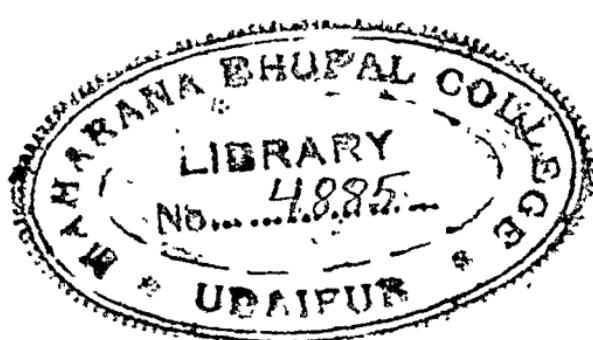


THE COMPLETE WORKS

1877]



THE COMPLETE WORKS
OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

—
BONCHURCH EDITION

VOL. XI

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THE COMPLETE WORKS
OF
ALGERNON CHARLES
SWINBURNE

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PROSE WORKS

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C O N T E N T S

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A STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE

VOL. XI.

A

I

THE greatest poet of our age has drawn a parallel of elaborate eloquence between Shakespeare and the sea ; and the likeness holds good in many points of less significance than those which have been set down by the master-hand. For two hundred years at least have students of every kind put forth in every sort of boat on a longer or a shorter voyage of research across the waters of that unsounded sea. From the paltriest fishing-craft to such majestic galleys as were steered by Coleridge and by Goethe, each division of the fleet has done or has essayed its turn of work ; some busied in dredging alongshore, some taking surveys of this or that gulf or headland, some putting forth through shine and shadow into the darkness of the great deep. Nor does it seem as if there would sooner be an end to men's labour on this than on the other sea. But here a difference is perceptible. The material ocean has been so far mastered by the wisdom and the heroism of man that we may look for a time to come when the mystery shall be manifest of its furthest north and south, and men resolve the secret of the uttermost parts of the sea : the poles also may find their Columbus. But the limits of that other ocean, the laws of its tides, the motive of its forces, the mystery of its unity and the secret of its change, no seafarer of us all may ever think thoroughly to know. No wind-gauge will help us to the science of its storms, no lead-line sound for us the depth of its divine and terrible serenity.

As, however, each generation for some two centuries now or more has witnessed fresh attempts at pilotage and fresh expeditions of discovery undertaken in the seas of Shakespeare, it may be well to study a little the laws of navigation in such waters as these, and look well to compass and rudder before we accept the guidance of a strange helmsman or make proffer for trial of our own. There are shoals and quicksands on which many a seafarer has run his craft aground in time past, and others of more special peril to adventurers of the present day. The chances of shipwreck vary in a certain degree with each new change of vessel and each fresh muster of hands. At one time a main rock of offence on which the stoutest ships of discovery were wont to split was the narrow and slippery reef of verbal emendation ; and upon this our native pilots were too many of them prone to steer. Others fell becalmed offshore in a German fog of philosophic theories, and would not be persuaded that the house of words they had built in honour of Shakespeare was ‘dark as hell,’ seeing ‘it had bay-windows transparent as barricadoes, and the clear-stories towards the south-north were as lustrous as ebony.’ These are not the most besetting dangers of more modern steersmen : what we have to guard against now is neither a repetition of the pedantries of Steevens nor a recrudescence of the moralities of Ulrici. Fresh follies spring up in new paths of criticism, and fresh labourers in a fruitless field are at hand to gather them and to garner. A discovery of some importance has recently been proclaimed as with blare of vociferous trumpets and flutter of triumphal flags ; no less a discovery than this—that a singer must be tested by his song. Well, it is something that criticism should at length be awake

to that wholly indisputable fact ; that learned and laborious men who can hear only with their fingers should open their eyes to admit such a novelty, their minds to accept such a paradox, as that a painter should be studied in his pictures and a poet in his verse. To the common herd of students and lovers of either art this may perhaps appear no great discovery ; but that it should at length have dawned even upon the race of commentators is a sign which in itself might be taken as a presage of new light to come in an epoch of miracle yet to be. Unhappily it is as yet but a partial revelation that has been vouchsafed to them. To the recognition of the apocalyptic fact that a workman can only be known by his work, and that without examination of his method and material that work can hardly be studied to much purpose, they have yet to add the knowledge of a further truth no less recondite and abstruse than this : that as the technical work of a painter appeals to the eye, so the technical work of a poet appeals to the ear. It follows that men who have none are as likely to arrive at any profitable end by the application of metrical tests to the work of Shakespeare as a blind man by the application of his theory of colours to the work of Titian.

It is certainly no news to other than professional critics that no means of study can be more precious or more necessary to a student of Shakespeare than this of tracing the course of his work by the growth and development, through various modes and changes, of his metre. But the faculty of using such means of study is not to be had for the asking ; it is not to be earned by the most assiduous toil, it is not to be secured by the learning of years, it is not to be attained by the devotion of a life. No proficiency in grammar

and arithmetic, no science of numeration and no scheme of prosody, will be here of the least avail. Though the pedagogue were Briareus himself who would thus bring Shakespeare under the rule of his rod or Shelley within the limit of his line, he would lack fingers on which to count the syllables that make up their music, the infinite varieties of measure that complete the changes and the chimes of perfect verse. It is but lost labour that they rise up so early, and so late take rest ; not a Scaliger or Salmasius of them all will sooner solve the riddle of the simplest than of the subtlest melody. Least of all will the method of a scholiast be likely to serve him as a clue to the hidden things of Shakespeare. For all the counting up of numbers and casting up of figures that a whole university—nay, a whole universe of pedants could accomplish, no teacher and no learner will ever be a whit the nearer to the haven where they would be. In spite of all tabulated statements and regulated summaries of research, the music which will not be dissected or defined, the ‘spirit of sense’ which is one and indivisible from the body or the raiment of speech that clothes it, keeps safe the secret of its sound. Yet it is no less a task than this that the scholiasts have girt themselves to achieve : they will pluck out the heart not of Hamlet’s but of Shakespeare’s mystery by the means of a metrical test ; and this test is to be applied by a purely arithmetical process. It is useless to pretend or to protest that they work by any rule but the rule of thumb and finger : that they have no ear to work by ; whatever outward show they may make of unmistakable ears, the very nature of their project gives full and damning proof. Properly understood, this that they call the metrical test is doubtless, as they say, the surest or the sole sure key to one side

of the secret of Shakespeare ; but they will never understand it properly who propose to secure it by the ingenious device of numbering the syllables and tabulating the results of a computation which shall attest in exact sequence the quantity, order, and proportion of single and double endings, of rhyme and blank verse, of regular lines and irregular, to be traced in each play by the horny eye and the callous finger of a pedant. ‘ I am ill at these numbers ’ ; those in which I have sought to become an expert are numbers of another sort ; but having, from well-nigh the first years I can remember, made of the study of Shakespeare the chief intellectual business and found in it the chief spiritual delight of my whole life, I can hardly think myself less qualified than another to offer an opinion on the metrical points at issue.

The progress and expansion of style and harmony in the successive works of Shakespeare must in some indefinite degree be perceptible to the youngest as to the oldest, to the dullest as to the keenest of Shakespearean students. But to trace and verify the various shades and gradations of this progress, the ebb and flow of alternate influences, the delicate and infinite subtleties of change and growth discernible in the spirit and the speech of the greatest among poets, is a task not less beyond the reach of a scholiast than beyond the faculties of a child. He who would attempt it with any chance of profit must above all things remember at starting that the inner and the outer qualities of a poet’s work are of their very nature indivisible ; that any criticism is of necessity worthless which looks to one side only, whether it be to the outer or to the inner quality of the work ; that the fatuity of pedantic ignorance never devised a grosser absurdity than the attempt to separate

aesthetic from scientific criticism by a strict line of demarcation, and to bring all critical work under one or the other head of this exhaustive division. Criticism without accurate science of the thing criticised can indeed have no other value than may belong to the genuine record of a spontaneous impression ; but it is not less certain that criticism which busies itself only with the outer husk or technical shell of a great artist's work, taking no account of the spirit or the thought which informs it, cannot have even so much value as this. Without study of his forms of metre or his scheme of colours we shall certainly fail to appreciate or even to apprehend the gist or the worth of a painter's or a poet's design ; but to note down the number of special words and cast up the sum of superfluous syllables used once or twice or twenty times in the structure of a single poem will help us exactly as much as a naked catalogue of the colours employed in a particular picture. A tabulated statement or summary of the precise number of blue or green, red or white draperies to be found in a precise number of paintings by the same hand will not of itself afford much enlightenment to any but the youngest of possible students ; nor will a mere list of double or single, masculine or feminine terminations discoverable in a given amount of verse from the same quarter prove of much use or benefit to an adult reader of common intelligence. What such an one requires is the guidance which can be given by no metremonger or colour-grinder : the suggestion which may help him to discern at once the cause and the effect of every choice or change of metre and of colour ; which may show him at one glance the reason and the result of every shade and of every tone which tends to compose and to complete the gradual scale

of their final harmonies. This method of study is generally accepted as the only one applicable to the work of a great painter by any criticism worthy of the name : it should also be recognised as the sole method by which the work of a great poet can be studied to any serious purpose. For the student it can be no less useful, for the expert it should be no less easy, to trace through its several stages of expansion and transfiguration the genius of Chaucer or of Shakespeare, of Milton or of Shelley, than the genius of Titian or of Raffaelle, of Turner or of Rossetti. Some great artists there are of either kind in whom no such process of growth or transformation is perceptible : of these are Coleridge and Blake ; from the sunrise to the sunset of their working day we can trace no demonstrable increase and no visible diminution of the divine capacities or the inborn defects of either man's genius ; but not of such, as a rule, are the greatest among artists of any sort.

Another rock on which modern steersmen of a more skilful hand than these are yet liable to run through too much confidence is the love of their own conjectures as to the actual date or the secret history of a particular play or passage. To err on this side requires more thought, more learning, and more ingenuity than we need think to find in a whole tribe of finger-counters and figure-casters ; but the outcome of these good gifts, if strained or perverted to capricious use, may prove no less barren of profit than the labours of a pedant on the letter of the text. It is a tempting exercise of intelligence for a dexterous and keen-witted scholar to apply his solid learning and his vivid fancy to the detection or the interpretation of some new or obscure point in a great man's life or work ; but none the less is it a perilous pastime

to give the reins to a learned fancy, and let loose conjecture on the trail of any dubious crotchet or the scent of any supposed allusion that may spring up in the way of its confident and eager quest. To start a new solution of some crucial problem, to track some new undercurrent of concealed significance in a passage hitherto neglected or misconstrued, is to a critic of this higher class a delight as keen as that of scientific discovery to students of another sort : the pity is that he can bring no such certain or immediate test to verify the value of his discovery as lies ready to the hand of the man of science. Whether he have lit upon a windfall or a mare's nest can be decided by no direct proof, but only by time and the general acceptance of competent judges ; and this cannot often be reasonably expected for theories which can appeal for support or confirmation to no positive evidence, but at best to a cloudy and shifting probability. What personal or political allusions may lurk under the text of Shakespeare we can never know, and should consequently forbear to hang upon a hypothesis of this floating and nebulous kind any serious opinion which might gravely affect our estimate of his work or his position in regard to other men, with whom some public or private interest may possibly have brought him into contact or collision.

THE aim of the present study is simply to set down what the writer believes to be certain demonstrable truths as to the progress and development of style, the outer and the inner changes of manner as of matter, of method as of design, which may be discerned in the work of Shakespeare. The principle here adopted and the views here put forward have not been suddenly discovered or lightly taken up out of any desire to make a show of theoretical ingenuity. For years past I have held and maintained, in private discussion with friends and fellow-students, the opinions which I now submit to more public judgment. How far they may coincide with those advanced by others I cannot say, and have not been careful to inquire. The mere fact of coincidence or of dissent on such a question is of less importance than the principle accepted by either student as the groundwork of his theory, the mainstay of his opinion. It is no part of my project or my hope to establish the actual date of any among the various plays, or to determine point by point the lineal order of their succession. I have examined no table or catalogue of recent or of earlier date, from the time of Malone onwards, with a view to confute by my reasoning the conclusions of another, or by the assistance of his theories to corroborate my own. It is impossible to fix or decide by inner or outer evidence the precise order of production, much less of composition, which critics of the present or the past may have set their wits to verify in vain ; but it is quite possible to show that the work of Shakespeare is naturally divisible into classes which may serve us to distinguish and

determine as by landmarks the several stages or periods of his mind and art.

Of these the three chief periods or stages are so unmistakably indicated by the mere text itself, and so easily recognisable by the veriest tiro in the school of Shakespeare, that even were I as certain of being the first to point them out as I am conscious of having long since discovered and verified them without assistance or suggestion from any but Shakespeare himself, I should be disposed to claim but little credit for a discovery which must in all likelihood have been forestalled by the common insight of some hundred or more students in time past. The difficulty begins with the really debatable question of subdivisions. There are certain plays which may be said to hang on the borderland between one period and the next, with one foot lingering and one advanced ; and these must be classed according to the dominant note of their style, the greater or lesser proportion of qualities proper to the earlier or the later stage of thought and writing. At one time I was inclined to think the whole catalogue more accurately divisible into four classes ; but the line of demarcation between the third and fourth would have been so much fainter than those which mark off the first period from the second, and the second from the third, that it seemed on the whole a more correct and adequate arrangement to assume that the last period might be subdivided if necessary into a first and second stage. This somewhat precise and pedantic scheme of study I have adopted from no love of rigid or formal system, but simply to make the method of my critical process as clear as the design. That design is to examine by internal evidence alone the growth and the expression of spirit and of speech, the ebb and flow of thought

and style, discernible in the successive periods of Shakespeare's work ; to study the phases of mind, the changes of tone, the passage or progress from an old manner to a new, the reversion or relapse from a later to an earlier habit, which may assuredly be traced in the modulations of his varying verse, but can only be traced by ear and not by finger. I have busied myself with no baseless speculations as to the possible or probable date of the first appearance of this play or of that on the stage ; and it is not unlikely that the order of succession here adopted or suggested may not always coincide with the chronological order of production ; nor will the principle or theory by which I have undertaken to class the successive plays of each period be affected or impaired though it should chance that a play ranked by me as belonging to a later stage of work should actually have been produced earlier than others which in my lists are assigned to a subsequent date. It is not, so to speak, the literal but the spiritual order which I have studied to observe and to indicate : the periods which I seek to define belong not to chronology but to art. No student need be reminded how common a thing it is to recognise in the later work of a great artist some partial reappearance of his early tone or manner, some passing return to his early lines of work and to habits of style since modified or abandoned. Such work, in part at least, may properly be said to belong rather to the earlier stage whose manner it resumes than to the later stage at which it was actually produced, and in which it stands out as a marked exception among the works of the same period. A famous and a most singularly beautiful example of this reflorescence as in a Saint Martin's summer of undecaying genius is the exquisite and crowning love-scene in the opera or

'ballet-tragedy' of *Psyche*, written in his sixty-fifth year by the august Roman hand of Pierre Corneille; a lyric symphony of spirit and of song fulfilled with all the colour and all the music that autumn could steal from spring if October had leave to go a Maying in some Olympian masquerade of melody and sunlight. And it is not easier, easy as it is, to discern and to define the three main stages of Shakespeare's work and progress, than to classify under their several heads the representative plays belonging to each period by the law of their nature, if not by the accident of their date. There are certain dominant qualities which do on the whole distinguish not only the later from the earlier plays, but the second period from the first, the third period from the second; and it is with these qualities alone that the higher criticism, be it æsthetic or scientific, has properly anything to do.

A new method of solution has been applied to various difficulties which have been discovered or invented in the text by the care or the perversity of recent commentators, whose principle of explanation is easier to abuse than to use with any likelihood of profit. It is at least simple enough for the simplest of critics to apply or misapply: whenever they see or suspect an inequality or an incongruity which may be wholly imperceptible to eyes uninured to the use of their spectacles, they assume at once the presence of another workman, the intrusion of a stranger's hand. This supposition of a double authorship is naturally as impossible to refute as to establish by other than internal evidence and appeal to the private judgment or perception of the reader. But it is no better than the last resource of an empiric, the last refuge of a sciolist; a refuge which the soundest of scholars will be slowest to seek, a resource which

the most competent of critics will be least ready to adopt. Once admitted as a principle of general application, there are no lengths to which it may not carry, there are none to which it has not carried, the audacious fatuity and the arrogant incompetence of tamperers with the authentic text. Recent editors who have taken on themselves the high office of guiding English youth in its first study of Shakespeare have proposed to excise or to obelise whole passages which the delight and wonder of youth and age alike, of the rawest as of the ripest among students, have agreed to consecrate as examples of his genius at its highest. In the last trumpet-notes of Macbeth's defiance and despair, in the last rallying cry of the hero re-awakened in the tyrant at his utmost hour of need, there have been men and scholars, Englishmen and editors, who have detected the alien voice of a pretender, the false ring of a foreign blast that was not blown by Shakespeare; words that for centuries past have touched with fire the hearts of thousands in each age since they were first inspired—words with the whole sound in them of battle or a breaking sea, with the whole soul of pity and terror mingled and melted into each other in the fierce last speech of a spirit grown 'aweary of the sun,' have been calmly transferred from the account of Shakespeare to the score of Middleton. And this, forsooth, the student of the future is to accept on the authority of men who bring to the support of their decision the unanswerable plea of years spent in the collation and examination of texts never hitherto explored and compared with such energy of learned labour. If this be the issue of learning and of industry, the most indolent and ignorant of readers who retains his natural capacity to be moved and mastered by the natural delight of contact with

heavenly things is better off by far than the most studious and strenuous of all scholiasts who ever claimed acquiescence or challenged dissent on the strength of his lifelong labours and hard-earned knowledge of the letter of the text. Such an one is indeed 'in a parlous state'; and any boy whose heart first begins to burn within him, who feels his blood kindle and his spirit dilate, his pulse leap and his eyes lighten, over a first study of Shakespeare, may say to such a teacher with better reason than Touchstone said to Corin, 'Truly, thou art damned; like an ill-roasted egg, all on one side.' Nor could charity itself hope much profit for him from the moving appeal and the pious prayer which temper that severity of sentence—'Wilt thou rest damned? God help thee, shallow man! God make incision in thee! Thou art raw.' And raw he is like to remain for all his learning, and for all incisions that can be made in the horny hide of a self-conceit to be pierced by the puncture of no man's pen. It was bad enough while theorists of this breed confined themselves to the suggestion of a possible partnership with Fletcher, a possible interpolation by Jonson; but in the descent from these to the alleged adulteration of the text by Middleton and Rowley we have surely sounded the very lowest depth of folly attainable by the utmost alacrity in sinking which may yet be possible to the bastard brood of Scriblerus. For my part, I shall not be surprised though the next discoverer should assure us that half at least of *Hamlet* is evidently due to the collaboration of Heywood, while the greater part of *Othello* is as clearly assignable to the hand of Shirley.

Akin to this form of folly, but less pernicious though not more profitable, is the fancy of invent-

ing some share for Shakespeare in the composition of plays which the veriest insanity of conjecture or caprice could not venture to lay wholly to his charge. This fancy, comparatively harmless as it is, requires no ground of proof to go upon, no prop of likelihood to support it ; without so much help as may be borrowed from the faintest and most fitful of traditions, it spins its own evidence spider-like out of its own inner conscience or conceit, and proffers it with confident complacency for men's acceptance. Here again I cannot but see a mere waste of fruitless learning and bootless ingenuity. That Shakespeare began by retouching and recasting the work of elder and lesser men we all know ; that he may afterwards have set his hand to the task of adding or altering a line or a passage here and there in some few of the plays brought out under his direction as manager or proprietor of a theatre is of course possible, but can neither be affirmed nor denied with any profit in default of the least fragment of historic or traditional evidence. Any attempt to verify the imaginary touch of his hand in plays of whose history we know no more than that they were acted on the boards of his theatre can be but a diversion for the restless leisure of ingenious and ambitious scholars ; it will give no clue by which the student who simply seeks to know what can be known with certainty of the poet and his work may hope to be guided towards any safe issue or trustworthy result. Less pardonable and more presumptuous than this is the pretension of minor critics to dissect an authentic play of Shakespeare scene by scene, and assign different parts of the same poem to different dates by the same pedagogic rules of numeration and mensuration which they would apply to the general question of

the order and succession of his collective works. This vivisection of a single poem is not defensible as a freak of scholarship, an excursion beyond the bounds of bare proof, from which the wanderer may chance to bring back, if not such treasure as he went out to seek, yet some stray godsend or rare literary windfall which may serve to excuse his indulgence in the seemingly profitless pastime of a truant disposition. It is a pure impertinence to affirm with oracular assurance what might perhaps be admissible as a suggestion offered with the due diffidence of modest and genuine scholarship ; to assert on the strength of a private pedant's personal intuition that such must be the history or such the composition of a great work whose history he alone could tell, whose composition he alone could explain, who gave it to us as his genius had given it to him.

From these several rocks and quicksands I trust at least to keep my humbler course at a safe distance, and steer clear of all sandy shallows of theory or sunken shoals of hypothesis on which no pilot can be certain of safe anchorage ; avoiding all assumption, though never so plausible, for which no ground but that of fancy can be shown, all suggestion though never so ingenious for which no proof but that of conjecture can be advanced. For instance, I shall neither assume nor accept the theory of a double authorship or of a double date by which the supposed inequalities may be accounted for, the supposed difficulties may be swept away, which for certain readers disturb the study of certain plays of Shakespeare. Only where universal tradition and the general concurrence of all reasonable critics past and present combine to indicate an unmistakable

difference of touch or an unmistakable diversity of date between this and that portion of the same play, or where the internal evidence of interpolation perceptible to the most careless and undeniable by the most perverse of readers is supported by the public judgment of men qualified to express and competent to defend an opinion, have I thought it allowable to adopt this facile method of explanation. No scholar, for example, believes in the single authorship of *Pericles* or *Andronicus*; none, I suppose, would now question the part taken by some hireling or journeyman in the arrangement or completion for the stage of *Timon of Athens*; and few probably would refuse to admit a doubt of the total authenticity or uniform workmanship of *The Taming of the Shrew*. As few I hope, are prepared to follow the fantastic and confident suggestions of every unquiet and arrogant innovator who may seek to append his name to the long scroll of Shakespearean parasites by the display of a brand-new hypothesis as to the uncertain date or authorship of some passage or some play which has never before been subjected to the scientific scrutiny of such a pertinacious analyst. The more modest design of the present study has in part been already indicated, and will explain as it proceeds if there be anything in it worth explanation. It is no part of my ambition to loose the Gordian knots which others who found them indissoluble have sought in vain to cut in sunder with blunter swords than the Macedonian; but after so many adventures and attempts there may perhaps yet be room for an attempt yet unessayed; for a study by the ear alone of Shakespeare's metrical progress, and a study by light of the knowledge thus obtained of the corresponsive progress within, which found expression

and embodiment in these outward and visible changes. The one study will be then seen to be the natural complement and the inevitable consequence of the other ; and the patient pursuit of the simpler and more apprehensible object of research will appear as the only sure method by which a reasonable and faithful student may think to attain so much as the porch or entrance to that higher knowledge which no faithful and reasonable study of Shakespeare can ever for a moment fail to keep in sight as the haven of its final hope, the goal of its ultimate labour.

When Christopher Marlowe came up to London from Cambridge, a boy in years, a man in genius, and a god in ambition, he found the stage which he was born to transfigure and re-create by the might and masterdom of his genius encumbered with a litter of rude rhyming farces and tragedies which the first wave of his imperial hand swept so utterly out of sight and hearing that hardly by piecing together such fragments of that buried rubbish as it is now possible to unearth can we rebuild in imagination so much of the rough and crumbling walls that fell before the trumpet-blast of *Tamburlaine* as may give us some conception of the rabble dynasty of rhymers whom he overthrew—of the citadel of dramatic barbarism which was stormed and sacked at the first charge of the young conqueror who came to lead English audiences and to deliver English poetry

From jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay.

When we speak of the drama that existed before the coming of Marlowe, and that vanished at his advent, we think usually of the rhyming plays written wholly or mainly in ballad verse of fourteen syllables

—of the Kings *Darius* and *Cambyses*, the *Promos and Cassandra* of Whetstone, or the *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* of George Peele. If we turn from these abortions of tragedy to the metrical farces which may fairly be said to contain the germ or embryo of English comedy (a form of dramatic art which certainly owes nothing to the father of our tragic stage), we find far more of hope and promise in the broad free sketches of the flagellant head-master of Eton and the bibulous Bishop of Bath and Wells ; and must admit that hands used to wield the crosier or the birch proved themselves more skilful at the lighter labours of the stage, more successful even in the secular and bloodless business of a field neither clerical nor scholastic, than any tragic rival of the opposite party to that so jovially headed by Orbilius Udall and Silenus Still. These twin pillars of church and school and stage were strong enough to support on the shoulders of their authority the first crude fabric or formless model of our comic theatre, while the tragic boards were still creaking and cracking under the jingling canter of *Cambyses* or the tuneless tramp of *Gorboduc*. This one play which the charity of Sidney excepts from his general anathema on the nascent stage of England has hitherto been erroneously described as written in blank verse ; an error which I can only attribute to the prevalence of a groundless assumption that whatever is neither prose nor rhyme must of necessity be definable as blank verse. But the measure, I must repeat, which was adopted by the authors of *Gorboduc* is by no means so definable. Blank it certainly is ; but verse it assuredly is not. There can be no verse where there is no modulation, no rhythm where there is no music. Blank verse came into life in England .

at the birth of the shoemaker's son who had but to open his yet beardless lips and the high-born poem which had Sackville to father and Sidney to sponsor was silenced and eclipsed for ever among the poor plebeian crowd of rhyming shadows that waited in death on the noble nothingness of its patrician shade.

These, I suppose, are the first or the only plays whose names recur to the memory of the general reader when he thinks of the English stage before Marlowe; but there was, I suspect, a whole class of plays then current, and more or less supported by popular favour, of which hardly a sample is now extant, and which cannot be classed with such as these. The poets or rhymesters who supplied them had already seen good to clip the cumbrous and bedraggled skirts of those dreary verses, run all to seed and weed, which jingled their thin bells at the tedious end of fourteen weary syllables; and for this curtailment of the shambling and sprawling lines which had hitherto done duty as tragic metre some credit may be due to these obscure purveyors of forgotten ware for the second epoch of our stage: if indeed, as I presume, we may suppose that this reform, such as it was, had begun before the time of Marlowe; otherwise, no doubt, little credit would be due to men who with so high an example before them were content simply to snip away the tags and fringes, to patch the seams and tatters, of the ragged coat of rhyme which they might have exchanged for that royal robe of heroic verse wherewith he had clothed the ungrown limbs of limping and lisping tragedy. But if these also may be reckoned among his precursors, the dismissal from stage service of the dolorous and drudging metre employed by the

earliest school of theatrical rhymesters must be taken to mark a real step in advance ; and in that case we possess at least a single example of the rhyming tragedies which had their hour between the last plays written wholly or partially in ballad metre and the first plays written in blank verse. The tragedy of *Selimus, Emperor of the Turks*, published in 1594,¹ may then serve to indicate this brief and obscure period of transition. Whole scenes of this singular play are written in rhyming iambics, some in the measure of *Don Juan*, some in the measure of *Venus and Adonis*. The couplets and quatrains so much affected and so reluctantly abandoned by Shakespeare after the first stage of his dramatic progress are in no other play that I know of diversified by this alternate variation of *sesta* with *ottava rima*. This may have been an exceptional experiment due merely to the caprice of one eccentric rhymester ; but in any case we may assume it to mark the extreme limit, the ultimate development of rhyming tragedy after the ballad metre had been happily exploded. The play is on other grounds worth attention as a sign of the times, though on poetical grounds it is assuredly worth none. Part of it is written in blank verse, or at least in rhymeless lines ; so that after all it probably followed in the wake of *Tamburlaine*, half adopting and half rejecting the innovations of that fiery reformer, who wrought on the old English stage no less a miracle than *Hernani* on the French stage in the days of our fathers. That *Selimus* was published four years later than *Tamburlaine*, in the year following the death of Marlowe, proves of course nothing as to the date of its production ; and even

¹ Reprinted by Dr. Grosart in his beautiful and valuable edition of Greene's works.

if it was written and acted in the year of its publication, it undoubtedly in the main represents the work of a prior era to the reformation of the stage by Marlowe. The level regularity of its unrhymed scenes is just like that of the weaker portions of *Titus Andronicus* and the *First Part of King Henry the Sixth*—the opening scene, for example, of either play. With *Andronicus* it has also in common the quality of exceptional monstrosity, a delight in the parade of mutilation as well as of massacre. It seems to me possible that the same hand may have been at work on all three plays; for that Marlowe's is traceable in those parts of the two retouched by Shakespeare which bear no traces of his touch is a theory to the full as absurd as that which would impute to Shakespeare the charge of their entire composition.

The revolution effected by Marlowe naturally raised the same cry against its author as the revolution effected by Hugo. That Shakespeare should not at once have enlisted under his banner is less inexplicable than it may seem. He was naturally addicted to rhyme, though if we put aside the Sonnets we must admit that in rhyme he never did anything worth Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*: he did not, like Marlowe, see at once that it must be reserved for less active forms of poetry than the tragic drama; and he was personally, it seems, in opposition to Marlowe and his school of academic playwrights—the band of bards in which Oxford and Cambridge were respectively and so respectably represented by Peele and Greene. But in his very first plays, comic or tragic or historic, we can see the collision and conflict of the two influences; his evil angel, rhyme, yielding step by step and note by note to the strong

advance of that better genius who came to lead him into the loftier path of Marlowe. There is not a single passage in *Titus Andronicus* more Shakespearean than the magnificent quatrain of Tamora upon the eagle and the little birds ; but the rest of the scene in which we come upon it, and the whole scene preceding, are in blank verse of more variety and vigour than we find in the baser parts of the play ; and these if any scenes we may surely attribute to Shakespeare. Again, the last battle of Talbot seems to me as undeniably the master's work as the scene in the Temple Gardens or the courtship of Margaret by Suffolk ; this latter indeed, full as it is of natural and vivid grace, may perhaps not be beyond the highest reach of one or two among the rivals of his earliest years of work ; while as we are certain that he cannot have written the opening scene, that he was at any stage of his career incapable of it, so may we believe as well as hope that he is guiltless of any complicity in that detestable part of the play which attempts to defile the memory of the virgin saviour of her country.¹ In style it is not, I think, above the range of George Peele at his best : and to have written even the last of those scenes can add but little discredit to the memory of a man already disgraced as the defamer of Eleanor of Castile ; while it would be a relief to feel assured that there was but one English poet of any genius who could be capable of either villainy.

In this play, then, more decisively than in *Titus Andronicus*, we find Shakespeare at work (so to speak)

¹ One thing is certain : that damnable last scene, at which the gorge rises even to remember it, is in execution as unlike the crudest phase of Shakespeare's style as in conception it is unlike the idlest birth of his spirit. Let us hope that so foul a thing could not have been done in even tolerably good verse.

with both hands—with his left hand of rhyme, and his right hand of blank verse. The left is loth to forego the practice of its peculiar music ; yet, as the action of the right grows freer and its touch grows stronger, it becomes more and more certain that the other must cease playing, under pain of producing mere discord and disturbance in the scheme of tragic harmony. We imagine that the writer must himself have felt the scene of the roses to be pitched in a truer key than the noble scene of parting between the old hero and his son on the verge of desperate battle and certain death. This is the last and loftiest farewell note of rhyming tragedy ; still, in *King Richard II.* and in *Romeo and Juliet* it struggles for a while to keep its footing, but now more visibly in vain. The rhymed scenes in these plays are too plainly the survivals of a ruder and feebler stage of work ; they cannot hold their own in the new order with even such discordant effect of incongruous excellence and inharmonious beauty as belongs to the death-scene of the Talbots when matched against the quarrelling scene of Somerset and York. Yet the briefest glance over the plays of the first epoch in the work of Shakespeare will suffice to show how protracted was the struggle and how gradual the defeat of rhyme. Setting aside the retouched plays, we find on the list one tragedy, two histories, and four if not five comedies, which the least critical reader would attribute to this first epoch of work. In three of these comedies rhyme can hardly be said to be beaten ; that is, the rhyming scenes are on the whole equal to the unrhymed in power and beauty. In the single tragedy, and in one of the two histories, we may say that rhyme fights hard for life, but is undeniably worsted ; that is, they contain as to

quantity a large proportion of rhymed verse, but as to quality the rhymed part bears no proportion whatever to the unrhymed. In two scenes we may say that the whole heart or spirit of *Romeo and Juliet* is summed up and distilled into perfect and pure expression ; and these two are written in blank verse of equable and blameless melody. Outside the garden scene in the second act and the balcony scene in the third, there is much that is fanciful and graceful, much of elegiac pathos and fervid if fantastic passion ; much also of superfluous rhetoric and (as it were) of wordy melody, which flows and foams hither and thither into something of extravagance and excess ; but in these two there is no flaw, no outbreak, no superflux, and no failure. Throughout certain scenes of the third and fourth acts I think it may be reasonably and reverently allowed that the river of verse has broken its banks, not as yet through the force and weight of its gathering stream, but merely through the weakness of the barriers or boundaries found insufficient to confine it. And here we may with deference venture on a guess why Shakespeare was so long so loth to forego the restraint of rhyme. When he wrote, and even when he rewrote or at least retouched, his youngest tragedy he had not yet strength to walk straight in the steps of the mighty master, but two months older than himself by birth, whose foot never from the first faltered in the arduous path of severer tragic verse. The loveliest of love-plays is after all a child of 'his salad days, when he was green in judgment,' though assuredly not 'cold in blood'—a physical condition as difficult to conceive of Shakespeare at any age as of Cleopatra. It is in the scenes of vehement passion, of ardour and of agony, that we feel the comparative

weakness of a yet ungrown hand, the tentative uncertain grasp of a stripling giant. The two utterly beautiful scenes are not of this kind ; they deal with simple joy and with simple sorrow, with the gladness of meeting and the sadness of parting love ; but between and behind them come scenes of more fierce emotion, full of surprise, of violence, of unrest ; and with these the poet is not yet (if I dare say so) quite strong enough to deal. Apollo has not yet put on the sinews of Hercules. At a later date we may fancy or may find that when the Herculean muscle is full-grown the voice in him which was as the voice of Apollo is for a passing moment impaired. In *Measure for Measure*, where the adult and gigantic god has grappled with the greatest and most terrible of energies and of passions, we miss the music of a younger note that rang through *Romeo and Juliet* ; but before the end this too revives, as pure, as sweet, as fresh, but richer now and deeper than its first clear notes of the morning, in the heavenly harmony of *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*.

The same effusion or effervescence of words is perceptible in *King Richard II.* as in the greater (and the less good) part of *Romeo and Juliet* ; and not less perceptible is the perpetual inclination of the poet to revert for help to rhyme, to hark back in search of support towards the half-forsaken habits of his poetic nonage. Feeling his foothold insecure on the hard and high ascent of the steeps of rhymeless verse, he stops and slips back ever and anon towards the smooth and marshy meadow whence he has hardly begun to climb. Any student who should wish to examine the conditions of the struggle at its height may be content to analyse the first act of this the first historical play of Shakespeare. As the

tragedy moves onward, and the style gathers strength while the action gathers speed,—as (to borrow the phrase so admirably applied by Coleridge to Dryden) the poet's chariot-wheels get hot by driving fast,—the temptation of rhyme grows weaker, and the hand grows firmer which before lacked strength to wave it off. The one thing wholly or greatly admirable in this play is the exposition of the somewhat pitiful but not unpitiable character of King Richard. Among the scenes devoted to this exposition I of course include the whole of the death-scene of Gaunt, as well the part which precedes as the part which follows the actual appearance of his nephew on the stage; and into these scenes the intrusion of rhyme is rare and brief. They are written almost wholly in pure and fluent rather than vigorous or various blank verse; though I cannot discern in any of them an equality in power and passion to the magnificent scene of abdication in Marlowe's *Edward II*. This play, I think, must undoubtedly be regarded as the immediate model of Shakespeare's; and the comparison is one of inexhaustible interest to all students of dramatic poetry. To the highest height of the earlier master I do not think that the mightier poet who was as yet in great measure his pupil has ever risen in this the first (as I take it) of his historic plays. Of composition and proportion he has perhaps already a somewhat better idea. But in grasp of character, always excepting the one central figure of the piece, we find his hand as yet the unsteadier of the two. Even after a lifelong study of this as of all other plays of Shakespeare, it is for me at least impossible to determine what I doubt if the poet could himself have clearly defined—the main principle, the motive and the meaning, of such characters as York, Norfolk,

and Aumerle. The Gaveston and the Mortimer of Marlowe are far more solid and definite figures than these ; yet none after that of Richard is more important to the scheme of Shakespeare. They are fitful, shifting, vaporous : their outlines change, withdraw, dissolve, and ' leave not a rack behind.' They, not Antony, are like the clouds of evening described in the most glorious of so many glorious passages put long afterwards by Shakespeare into the mouth of his latest Roman hero. They ' cannot hold this visible shape ' in which the poet at first presents them even long enough to leave a distinct image, a decisive impression for better or for worse, upon the mind's eye of the most simple and open-hearted reader. They are ghosts, not men ; *simulacra modis pallentia miris*. You cannot descry so much as the original intention of the artist's hand which began to draw and relaxed its hold of the brush before the first lines were fairly traced. And in the last, the worst and weakest scene of all, in which York pleads with Bolingbroke for the death of the son whose mother pleads against her husband for his life, there is a final relapse into rhyme and rhyming epigram, into the ' jigging vein ' dried up (we might have hoped) long since by the very glance of Marlowe's Apollonian scorn. It would be easy, agreeable, and irrational to ascribe without further evidence than its badness this misconceived and misshapen scene to some other hand than Shakespeare's. It is below the weakest, the rudest, the hastiest scene attributable to Marlowe ; it is false, wrong, artificial beyond the worst of his bad and boyish work ; but it has a certain likeness for the worse to the crudest work of Shakespeare. It is difficult to say to what depths of bad taste the writer of certain passages in *Venus and Adonis* could

not fall before his genius or his judgment was full-grown. To invent an earlier play on the subject and imagine this scene a surviving fragment, a floating waif of that imaginary wreck, would in my opinion be an uncritical mode of evading the question at issue. It must be regarded as the last hysterical struggle of rhyme to maintain its place in tragedy ; and the explanation, I would fain say the excuse, of its reappearance may perhaps be simply this : that the poet was not yet dramatist enough to feel for each of his characters an equal or proportionate regard ; to divide and disperse his interest among the various crowd of figures which claim each in its place, and each after its kind, a fair and adequate share of their creator's attention and sympathy. His present interest was here wholly concentrated on the single figure of Richard ; and when that for the time was absent, the subordinate figures became to him but heavy and vexatious encumbrances, to be shifted on and off the stage with as much of haste and as little of labour as might be possible to an impatient and uncertain hand. Now all tragic poets, I presume, from *Aeschylus* the godlike father of them all to the last aspirant who may struggle after the traces of his steps, have been poets before they were tragedians ; their lips have had power to sing before their feet had strength to tread the stage, before their hands had skill to paint or carve figures from the life. With Shakespeare it was so as certainly as with Shelley, as evidently as with Hugo. It is in the great comic poets, in Molière and in Congreve,¹ our own lesser

¹ It is not the least of Lord Macaulay's offences against art that he should have contributed the temporary weight of his influence as a critic to the support of so ignorant and absurd a tradition of criticism as that which classes the great writer here mentioned with the brutal if 'brawny' Wycherley—

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Molière, so far inferior in breadth and depth, in tenderness and strength, to the greatest writer of the 'great age,' yet so near him in science and in skill, so like him in brilliance and in force,—it is in these that we find theatrical instinct twin-born with imaginative impulse, dramatic power with inventive perception.

In the second historic play which can be wholly ascribed to Shakespeare we still find the poetic or rhetorical quality for the most part in excess of the dramatic; but in *King Richard III.* the bonds of rhyme at least are fairly broken. This only of all Shakespeare's plays belongs absolutely to the school of Marlowe. The influence of the elder master, and that influence alone, is perceptible from end to end. Here at last we can see that Shakespeare has decidedly chosen his side. It is as fiery in passion, as single in purpose, as rhetorical often though never so inflated in expression, as *Tamburlaine* itself. It is doubtless a better piece of work than Marlowe ever did; I dare not say, that Marlowe ever could have done. It is not for any man to measure, above all it is not for any workman in the field of tragic poetry lightly to take on himself the responsibility or the authority to pronounce, what it is that Christopher Marlowe could not have done; but, dying as he did and when he did, it is certain that he has not left us a work so generally and so variously admirable as *King Richard*.

a classification almost to be paralleled with that which in the days of our fathers saw fit to couple together the names of Bilitz and of Sue. Any competent critic will always recognise in *The Way of the World* one of the glories, in *The Country Wife* one of the disgraces, of dramatic and of English literature. The stains discernible on the masterpiece of Congreve are trivial and conventional; the mere conception of the other man's work displays a mind so prurient and leprous, uncovers such an unfathomable and unimaginable beastliness of imagination, that in the present age at least he would probably have figured as a virtuous journalist and professional rebuker of poetic vice or artistic aberration.

III. As certain is it that but for him this play could never have been written. At a later date the subject would have been handled otherwise, had the poet chosen to handle it at all ; and in his youth he could not have treated it as he has without the guidance and example of Marlowe. Not only are its highest qualities of energy, of exuberance, of pure and lofty style, of sonorous and successive harmonies, the very qualities that never fail to distinguish those first dramatic models which were fashioned by his ardent hand ; the strenuous and single-handed grasp of character, the motion and action of combining and contending powers, which here for the first time we find sustained with equal and unfaltering vigour throughout the length of a whole play, we perceive, though imperfectly, in the work of Marlowe before we can trace them even as latent or infant forces in the work of Shakespeare.

In the exquisite and delightful comedies of his earliest period we can hardly discern any sign, any promise of them at all. One only of these, *The Comedy of Errors*, has in it anything of dramatic composition and movement ; and what it has of these, I need hardly remind the most cursory of students, is due by no means to Shakespeare. What is due to him, and to him alone, is the honour of having embroidered on the naked old canvas of comic action those flowers of elegiac beauty which vivify and diversify the scene of Plautus as reproduced by the art of Shakespeare. In the next generation so noble a poet as Rotrou, whom perhaps it might not be inaccurate to call the French Marlowe, and who had (what Marlowe had not) the gift of comic as well as of tragic excellence, found nothing of this kind and little of any kind to add to the old poet's admirable but arid

sketch of farcical incident or accident. But in this light and lovely work of the youth of Shakespeare we find for the first time that strange and sweet admixture of farce with fancy, of lyric charm with comic effect, which recurs so often in his later work, from the date of *As You Like It* to the date of *The Winter's Tale*, and which no later poet had ventured to recombine in the same play till our own time had given us, in the author of *Tragaldabas*, one who could alternate without confusing the woodland courtship of Eliseo and Caprina with the tavern braggardism of Grif and Minotoro. The sweetness and simplicity of lyric or elegiac loveliness which fill and inform the scenes where Adriana, her sister, and the Syracusan Antipholus exchange the expression of their errors and their loves, belong to Shakespeare alone ; and may help us to understand how the young poet who at the outset of his divine career had struck into this fresh untrodden path of poetic comedy should have been, as we have seen that he was, loth to learn from another and an alien teacher the hard and necessary lesson that this flowery path would never lead him towards the loftier land of tragic poetry. For as yet, even in the nominally or intentionally tragic and historic work of the first period, we descry always and everywhere and still preponderant the lyric element, the fantastic element, or even the elegiac element. All these queens and heroines of history and tragedy have rather an Ovidian than a Sophoclean grace of bearing and of speech.

The example afforded by *The Comedy of Errors* would suffice to show that rhyme, however inadequate for tragic use, is by no means a bad instrument for romantic comedy. In another of Shakespeare's earliest

works, which might almost be described as a lyrical farce, rhyme plays also a great part; but the finest passage, the real crown and flower of *Love's Labour's Lost*, is the praise or apology of love spoken by Biron in blank verse. This is worthy of Marlowe for dignity and sweetness, but has also the grace of a light and radiant fancy enamoured of itself, begotten between thought and mirth, a child-god with grave lips and laughing eyes, whose inspiration is nothing akin to Marlowe's. In this as in the overture of the play and in its closing scene, but especially in the noble passage which winds up for a year the courtship of Biron and Rosaline, the spirit which informs the speech of the poet is finer of touch and deeper of tone than in the sweetest of the serious interludes of *The Comedy of Errors*. The play is in the main a yet lighter thing, and more wayward and capricious in build, more formless and fantastic in plot, more incomposite altogether than that first heir of Shakespeare's comic invention, which on its own ground is perfect in its consistency, blameless in composition and coherence; while in *Love's Labour's Lost* the fancy for the most part runs wild as the wind, and the structure of the story is as that of a house of clouds which the wind builds and unbuilds at pleasure. Here we find a very riot of rhymes, wild and wanton in their half-grown grace as a troop of 'young satyrs, tender-hoofed and ruddy-horned'; during certain scenes we seem almost to stand again by the cradle of new-born comedy, and hear the first lisping and laughing accents run over from her baby lips in bubbling rhyme; but when the note changes we recognise the speech of gods. For the first time in our literature the higher key of poetic or romantic comedy is finely touched to a fine issue.

The divine instrument fashioned by Marlowe for tragic purposes alone has found at once its new sweet use in the hands of Shakespeare. The way is prepared for *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*; the language is discovered which will befit the lips of Rosalind and Miranda.

What was highest as poetry in *The Comedy of Errors* was mainly in rhyme; all indeed, we might say, between the prelude spoken by Ægeon and the appearance in the last scene of his wife: in *Love's Labour's Lost* what was highest was couched wholly in blank verse; in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* rhyme has fallen seemingly into abeyance, and there are no passages of such elegiac beauty as in the former, of such exalted eloquence as in the latter of these plays; there is an even sweetness, a simple equality of grace in thought and language which keeps the whole poem in tune, written as it is in a subdued key of unambitious harmony. In perfect unity and keeping the composition of this beautiful sketch may perhaps be said to mark a stage of advance, a new point of work attained, a faint but sensible change of manner, signalled by increased firmness of hand and clearness of outline. Slight and swift in execution as it is, few and simple as are the chords here struck of character and emotion, every shade of drawing and every note of sound is at one with the whole scheme of form and music. Here too is the first dawn of that higher and more tender humour which was never given in such perfection to any man as ultimately to Shakespeare; one touch of the byplay of Launce and his immortal dog is worth all the bright fantastic interludes of Boyet and Adriano, Costard and Holofernes; worth even half the sallies of Mercutio, and half the dancing

doggrel or broad-witted prose of either Dromio. But in the final poem which concludes and crowns the first epoch of Shakespeare's work, the special graces and peculiar glories of each that went before are gathered together as in one garland 'of every hue and every scent.' The young genius of the master of all our poets finds its consummation in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The blank verse is as full, sweet, and strong as the best of Biron's or Romeo's ; the rhymed verse as clear, pure, and true as the simplest and truest melody of *Venus and Adonis* or *The Comedy of Errors*. But here each kind of excellence is equal throughout ; there are here no purple patches on a gown of serge, but one seamless and imperial robe of a single dye. Of the lyric or the prosaic part, the counterchange of loves and laughters, of fancy fine as air and imagination high as heaven, what need can there be for any one to shame himself by the helpless attempt to say some word not utterly unworthy ? Let it suffice us to accept this poem as the landmark of our first stage, and pause to look back from it on what lies behind us of partial or of perfect work.

The highest point attained in this first period lies in the domain of comedy or romance, and belongs as much to lyric as to dramatic poetry ; its sovereign quality is that of sweetness and springtide of fairy fancy crossed with light laughter and light trouble that end in perfect music. In history as in tragedy the master's hand has not yet come to its full strength and skill ; its touch is not yet wholly assured, its work not yet wholly blameless. Besides the plays undoubtedly and entirely due to the still growing genius of Shakespeare, we have taken note but of two among those which bear the partial imprint of

his hand. The long-vexed question as to the authorship of the latter parts of *King Henry VI.*, in their earlier or later form, has not been touched upon ; nor do I design to reopen that perpetual source of debate, unstanchable and inexhaustible dispute by any length of scrutiny or inquisition of detail. Two points must of course be taken for granted : that Marlowe was more or less concerned in the production, and Shakespeare in the revision of these plays ; whether before or after his additions to the original *First Part of King Henry VI.* we cannot determine, though the absence of rhyme might seem to indicate a later date for the recast of the *Contention*. But it is noticeable that the style of Marlowe appears more vividly and distinctly in passages of the reformed than of the unreformed plays. Those famous lines, for example, which open the fourth act of the *Second Part of King Henry VI.* are not to be found in the corresponding scene of the first part of the *Contention* ; yet, whether they belong to the original sketch of the play, or were inserted as an afterthought into the revised and expanded copy, the authorship of these verses is surely unmistakable :—

The gaudy, blabbing, and remorseful day
 Is crept into the bosom of the sea ;
 And now loud howling wolves arouse the jades
 That drag the tragic melancholy night—

Aut Christophorus Marlowe, aut diabolus ; it is inconceivable that any imitator but one should have had the power so to catch the very trick of his hand, the very note of his voice, and incredible that the one who might would have set himself to do so : for if this be not indeed the voice and this the hand of Marlowe, then what we find in these verses is not the

fidelity of a follower, but the servility of a copyist. No parasitic rhymester of past or present days who feeds his starveling talent on the shreds and orts, ‘the fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy relics’ of another man’s board, ever uttered a more parrot-like note of plagiary. The very exactitude of the repetition is a strong argument against the theory which attributes it to Shakespeare. That he had much at starting to learn of Marlowe, and that he did learn much—that in his earliest plays, and above all in his earliest historic plays, the influence of the elder poet, the echo of his style, the iteration of his manner, may perpetually be traced—I have already shown that I should be the last to question; but so exact an echo, so servile an iteration as this, I believe we shall nowhere find in them. The sonorous accumulation of emphatic epithets—as in the magnificent first verse of this passage—is indeed at least as much a note of the young Shakespeare’s style as of his master’s; but even were this one verse less in the manner of the elder than the younger poet—and this we can hardly say that it is—no single verse detached from its context can weigh a feather against the full and flawless evidence of the whole speech. And of all this there is nothing in the *Contention*; the scene there opens in bald and flat nakedness of prose, striking at once into the immediate matter of stage business without the decoration of a passing epithet or a single trope.

From this sample it might seem that the main difficulty must be to detect anywhere the sign-manual of Shakespeare, even in the best passages of the revised play. On the other hand, it has not unreasonably been maintained that even in the next scene of this same act in its original form, and in

all those following which treat of Cade's insurrection, there is evidence of such qualities as can hardly be ascribed to any hand then known but Shakespeare's. The forcible realism, the simple vigour and lifelike humour of these scenes, cannot, it is urged, be due to any other so early at work in the field of comedy. A critic desirous to press this point might further insist on the likeness or identity of tone between these and all later scenes in which Shakespeare has taken on him to paint the action and passion of an insurgent populace. With him, it might too plausibly be argued, the people once risen in revolt for any just or unjust cause is always the mob, the unwashed rabble, the swinish multitude; full as he is of wise and gracious tenderness for individual character, of swift and ardent pity for personal suffering, he has no deeper or finer feeling than scorn for 'the beast with many heads' that fawn and butt at bidding as they are swayed by the vain and violent breath of any worthless herdsman. For the drovers who guide and misguide at will the turbulent flocks of their mutinous cattle his store of bitter words is inexhaustible; it is a treasure-house of obloquy which can never be drained dry. All this, or nearly all this, we must admit; but it brings us no nearer to any but a floating and conjectural kind of solution. In the earliest form known to us of this play it should seem that we have traces of Shakespeare's handiwork, in the latest that we find evidence of Marlowe's. But it would be something too extravagant for the veriest wind-sucker among commentators to start a theory that a revision was made of his original work by Marlowe after additions had been made to it by Shakespeare; yet we have seen that the most unmistakable signs of Marlowe's handiwork, the passages

which show most plainly the personal and present seal of his genius, belong to the play only in its revised form ; while there is no part of the whole composition which can so confidently be assigned to Shakespeare as to the one man then capable of such work, as can an entire and important episode of the play in its unrevised state. Now the proposition that Shakespeare was the sole author of both plays in their earliest extant shape is refuted at once, and equally from without and from within, by evidence of tradition and by evidence of style. There is therefore proof irresistible and unmistakable of at least a double authorship ; and the one reasonable conclusion left to us would seem to be this : that the first edition we possess of these plays is a partial transcript of the text as it stood after the first additions had been made by Shakespeare to the original work of Marlowe and others ; for that this original was the work of more hands than one, and hands of notably unequal power, we have again the united witness of traditional and internal evidence to warrant our belief : and that among the omissions of this imperfect text were certain passages of the original work, which were ultimately restored in the final revision of the entire poem as it now stands among the collected works of Shakespeare.

No competent critic who has given due study to the genius of Marlowe will admit that there is a single passage of tragic or poetic interest in either form of the text, which is beyond the reach of the father of English tragedy : or, if there be one seeming exception in the expanded and transfigured version of Clifford's monologue over his father's corpse, which is certainly more in Shakespeare's tragic manner than in Marlowe's, and in the style of a later period than

that in which he was on the whole apparently content to reproduce or to emulate the tragic manner of Marlowe, there is at least but this one exception to the general and absolute truth of the rule ; and even this great tragic passage is rather out of the range of Marlowe's style than beyond the scope of his genius. In the later as in the earlier version of these plays, the one manifest excellence of which we have no reason to suppose him capable is manifest in the comic or prosaic scenes alone. The first great rapid sketch of the dying cardinal, afterwards so nobly enlarged and perfected on revision by the same or by a second artist, is as clearly within the capacity of Marlowe as of Shakespeare ; and in either edition of the latter play, successively known as *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*, as the *Second Part of the Contention*, and as the *Third Part of King Henry VI.*, the dominant figure which darkens all the close of the poem with presage of a direr day is drawn by the same strong hand in the same tragic outline. From the first to the last stage of the work there is no mark of change or progress here ; the whole play indeed has undergone less revision, as it certainly needed less, than the preceding part of the *Contention*. Those great verses which resume the whole spirit of Shakespeare's Richard—finer perhaps in themselves than any passage of the play which bears his name—are well-nigh identical in either form of the poem ; but the reviser, with admirable judgment, has struck out, whether from his own text or that of another, the line which precedes them in the original sketch, where the passage runs thus :—

I had no father, I am like no father ;
I have no brothers, I am like no brother ;

(this reiteration is exactly in the first manner of our tragic drama ;)

And this word love, which greybeards term divine, etc.

It would be an impertinence to transcribe the rest of a passage which rings in the ear of every reader's memory ; but it may be noted that the erasure by which its effect is so singularly heightened with the inborn skill of so divine an instinct is just such an alteration as would be equally likely to occur to the original writer on glancing over his printed text or to a poet of kindred power, who, while busied in retouching and filling out the sketch of his predecessor, might be struck by the opening for so great an improvement at so small a cost of suppression. My own conjecture would incline to the belief that we have here a perfect example of the manner in which Shakespeare may be presumed, when such a task was set before him, to have dealt with the text of Marlowe. That at the outset of his career he was so employed, as well as on the texts of lesser poets, we have on all hands as good evidence of every kind as can be desired ; proof on one side from the text of the revised plays, which are as certainly in part the work of his hand as they are in part the work of another ; and proof on the opposite side from the open and clamorous charge of his rivals, whose imputations can be made to bear no reasonable meaning but this by the most violent ingenuity of perversion, and who presumably were not persons of such frank imbecility, such innocent and infantine malevolence, as to forge against their most dangerous enemy the pointless and edgeless weapon of a charge which, if ungrounded, must have been easier to refute than to devise. Assuming then

that in common with other young poets of his day he was thus engaged during the first years of his connection with the stage, we should naturally have expected to find him handling the text of Marlowe with more of reverence and less of freedom than that of meaner men : ready, as in the *Contention*, to clear away with no timid hand their weaker and more inefficient work, to cancel and supplant it by worthier matter of his own ; but when occupied in recasting the verse of Marlowe, not less ready to confine his labour to such slight and skilful strokes of art as that which has led us into this byway of speculation ; to the correction of a false note, the addition of a finer touch, the perfection of a meaning half expressed or a tone of half-uttered music ; to the invigoration of sense and metre by substitution of the right word for the wrong, of a fuller phrase for one feebler ; to the excision of such archaic and superfluous repetitions as are signs of a cruder stage of workmanship, relics of a ruder period of style, survivals of the earliest form or habit of dramatic poetry. Such work as this, however humble in our present eyes, which look before and after, would assuredly have been worthy of the workman and his task ; an office no less fruitful of profit, and no more unbeseeming the pupil hand of the future master, than the subordinate handiwork of the young Raffaelle or Leonardo on the canvas of Verrocchio or Perugino.

Of the doubtful or spurious plays which have been with more or less show of reason ascribed to this first period of Shakespeare's art, I have here no more to say than that I purpose in the proper place to take account of the only two among them which bear the slightest trace of any possible touch of his hand. For these two there is not, as it happens,

the least witness of tradition or outward likelihood which might warrant us in assigning them a place apart from the rest, and nearer the chance of reception into the rank that has been claimed for them ; while those plays in whose favour there is some apparent evidence from without, such as the fact of early or even original attribution to the master's hand, are, with one possible exception, utterly beyond the pale of human consideration as at any stage whatever the conceivable work of Shakespeare.

Considering that his two attempts at narrative or rather semi-narrative and semi-reflective poetry belong obviously to an early stage of his earliest period, we may rather here than elsewhere take notice that there are some curious points of coincidence for evil as for good between the fortunes of Shakespeare's plays and the fortunes of his poems. In either case we find that some part at least of his earlier and inferior work has fared better at the blind hands of chance and the brutish hands of printers than some part at least of his riper and more precious products. His two early poems would seem to have had the good hap of his personal supervision in their passage through the press. Upon them, at least since the time of Coleridge, who as usual has said on this subject the first and the last word that need be said, it seems to me that fully sufficient notice and fully adequate examination have been expended ; and that nothing at once new and true can now be profitably said in praise or in dispraise of them. Of *A Lover's Complaint*, marked as it is throughout with every possible sign suggestive of a far later date and a far different inspiration, I have only space or need to remark that it contains two of the most exquisitely Shakespearean verses ever vouchsafed to us by Shake-

speare, and two of the most execrably euphuistic or dysphuistic lines ever inflicted on us by man. Upon the Sonnets such a preposterous pyramid of presumptuous commentary has long since been reared by the Cimmerian speculation and Boeotian 'brain-sweat' of sciolists and scholiasts, that no modest man will hope and no wise man will desire to add to the structure or subtract from it one single brick of proof or disproof, theorem or theory. As yet the one contemporary book which has ever been supposed to throw any direct or indirect light on the mystic matter remains as inaccessible and unhelpful to students as though it had never been published fifteen years earlier than the date of their publication and four years before the book in which Meres notices the circulation of Shakespeare's 'sugared sonnets among his private friends.' It would be a most noble and thankworthy addition to a list of labours beyond praise and benefits beyond price, if my honoured friend Dr. Grosart could find the means to put a crown upon the achievements of his learning and a seal upon the obligations of our gratitude by the one inestimable boon long hoped for against hoping, and as yet but 'a vision in a dream' to the most learned and most loving of true Shakespearean students; by the issue or reissue in its full and perfect likeness, collated at last and complete, of *Willolie his Avisa*.¹

¹ Since this passage first went to press, I have received from Dr. Grosart the most happy news that he has procured a perfect copy of this precious volume, and will shortly add it to his occasional issues of golden waifs and strays forgotten by the ebb-tide of time. Not even the disinterment of Robert Chester's 'glorified' poem, with its appended jewels of verse from all now at last reset in their strange original framework, was a gift of greater price than this.

It was long since more than time that the worthless and impudent imposture called *The Passionate Pilgrim* should be exposed and expelled from its station at the far end of Shakespeare's poems. What Coleridge said of Ben Jonson's epithet for 'turtle-footed peace,' we may say of the label affixed to this rag-picker's bag of stolen goods : *The Passionate Pilgrim* is a pretty title, a very pretty title ; pray what may it mean ? In all the larcenous little bundle of verse there is neither a poem which bears that name nor a poem by which that name would be bearable. The publisher of the booklet was like 'one Ragozine, a most notorious pirate' ; and the method no less than the motive of his rascality in the present instance is palpable and simple enough. Fired by the immediate and instantly proverbial popularity of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, he hired, we may suppose, some ready hack of unclean hand to supply him with three doggrel sonnets on the same subject, noticeable only for their porcine quality of prurience : he procured by some means a rough copy or an incorrect transcript of two genuine and unpublished sonnets by Shakespeare, which with the acute instinct of a felonious tradesman he laid atop of his worthless wares by way of gilding to their base metal : he stole from the two years published text of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and reproduced with more or less mutilation or corruption, the sonnet of Longavile, the 'canzonet' of Biron, and the far lovelier love-song of Dumaine. The rest of the ragman's gatherings, with three most notable exceptions, is little better for the most part than dry rubbish or disgusting refuse : unless a plea may haply be put in for the pretty commonplaces of the lines on a 'sweet rose, fair flower,' and so forth ;

for the couple of thin and pallid if tender and tolerable copies of verse on 'Beauty' and 'Good Night,' or the passably light and lively stray of song on 'crabbed age and youth.' I need not say that those three exceptions are the stolen and garbled work of Marlowe and of Barnfield, our elder Shelley and our first-born Keats; the singer of Cynthia in verse well worthy of Endymion, who would seem to have died as a poet in the same fatal year of his age that Keats died as a man; the first adequate English laureate of the nightingale, to be supplanted or equalled by none until the advent of his mightier brother.

II

THE second period is that of perfection in comic and historic style. The final heights and depths of tragedy, with all its reach of thought and all its pulse of passion, are yet to be scaled and sounded ; but to this stage belongs the special quality of faultless, joyous, facile command upon each faculty required of the presiding genius for service or for sport. It is in the middle period of his work that the language of Shakespeare is most limpid in its fullness, the style most pure, the thought most transparent through the close and luminous raiment of perfect expression. The conceits and crudities of the first stage are outgrown and cast aside ; the harshness and obscurity which at times may strike us as among the notes of his third manner have as yet no place in the flawless work of this second stage. That which has to be said is not yet too great for perfection of utterance ; passion has not yet grappled with thought in so close and fierce an embrace as to strain and rend the garment of words, though stronger and subtler than ever was woven of human speech. Neither in his first nor in his last stage would the style of Shakespeare, even were it possible by study to reproduce it, be of itself a perfect and blameless model ; but his middle style, that in which the typical plays of his second period are written, would be, if it were possible to imitate, the most absolute pattern that could be

set before man. I do not speak of mere copyist's work, the parasitic knack of retailing cast phrases, tricks and turns of accent, cadences and catchwords proper only to the natural manner of the man who first came by instinct upon them, and by instinct put them to use ; I speak of that faithful and fruitful discipleship of love with which the highest among poets and the most original among workmen have naturally been always the first to study and the most earnest to follow the footsteps of their greatest precursors in that kind. And this only high and profitable form of study and discipleship can set before itself, even in the work of Shakespeare, no pattern so perfect, no model so absolute, as is afforded by the style or manner of his second period.

To this stage belong by spiritual right if not by material, by rule of poetic order if not by date of actual succession, the greatest of his English histories and four of his greatest and most perfect comedies ; the four greatest we might properly call them, reserving for another class the last divine triad of romantic plays which it is alike inaccurate to number among tragedies or comedies proper : *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, which belong of course wholly to his last manner, or, if accuracy must be strained even to pedantry, to the second manner of his third or final stage. A single masterpiece which may be classed either among histories or tragedies belongs to the middle period ; and to this also we must refer, if not the ultimate form, yet assuredly the first sketch at least of that which is commonly regarded as the typical and supreme work of Shakespeare. Three lesser comedies, one of them in great part the recast or rather the transfiguration of an

earlier poet's work, complete the list of plays assignable to the second epoch of his genius.

The ripest fruit of historic or national drama, the consummation and the crown of Shakespeare's labours in that line, must of course be recognised and saluted by all students in the supreme and sovereign trilogy of *King Henry IV.* and *King Henry V.* On a lower degree only than this final and imperial work we find the two chronicle histories which remain to be classed. In style as in structure they bear witness of a power less perfect, a less impeccable hand. They have less of perceptible instinct, less of vivid and vigorous utterance ; the breath of their inspiration is less continuous and less direct, the fashion of their eloquence is more deliberate and more pre-pense ; there is more of study and structure apparent in their speech, and less in their general scheme of action. Of all Shakespeare's plays they are the most rhetorical ; there is more talk than song in them, less poetry than oratory ; more finish than form, less movement than incident. Scene is laid upon scene, and event succeeds event, as stone might be laid on stone and story might succeed story in a building reared by mere might of human handiwork ; not as in a city or temple whose walls had risen of themselves to the lyric breath and stroke of a greater than Amphion ; moulded out of music by no rule or line of mortal measure, with no sound of axe or anvil, but only of smitten strings : built by harp and not by hand.

The lordly structure of these poems is the work of a royal workman, full of masterdom and might, sublime in the state and strength of its many mansions, but less perfect in proportion and less aerial in build than the very highest fabrics fashioned after their own great will by the supreme architects of song.

Of these plays, and of these alone among the maturer works of Shakespeare, it may be said that the best parts are discernible from the rest, divisible by analysis and separable by memory from the scenes which precede them or follow and the characters which surround them or succeed. Constance and Katherine rise up into remembrance apart from their environment and above it, stand clear in our minds of the crowded company with which the poet has begirt their central figures. In all other of his great tragic works,—even in *Hamlet*, if we have grace and sense to read it aright and not awry,—it is not of any single person or separate passage that we think when we speak of it ; it is to the whole masterpiece that the mind turns at mention of its name. The one entire and perfect chrysolite of *Othello* is neither Othello nor Desdemona nor Iago, but each and all ; the play of *Hamlet* is more than Hamlet himself, the poem even here is too great to be resumed in the person. But Constance is the jewel of *King John*, and Katherine is the crowning blossom of *King Henry VIII.*—a funeral flower as of ‘ marigolds on death-beds blowing,’ an opal of as pure water as ‘ tears of perfect moan,’ with fitful fire at its heart, ominous of evil and sorrow, set in a mourning band of jet on the forefront of the poem, that the brow so circled may, ‘ like to a title-leaf, foretell the nature of a tragic volume.’ Not indeed that without these the ground would in either case be barren ; but that in either field our eye rests rather on these and other separate ears of wheat that overtop the ranks, than on the waving width of the whole harvest at once. In the one play our memory turns next to the figures of Arthur and the Bastard, in the other to those of Wolsey and his king : the residue in either case is made up of out-

lines more lightly and slightly drawn. In two scenes the figure of King John rises indeed to the highest height even of Shakespearean tragedy ; for the rest of the play the lines of his character are cut no deeper, the features of his personality stand out in no sharper relief, than those of Eleanor or the French king ; but the scene in which he tempts Hubert to the edge of the pit of hell sounds a deeper note and touches a subtler string in the tragic nature of man than had been struck by any poet save Dante alone, since the reign of the Greek tragedians. The cunning and profound simplicity of the few last weighty words which drop like flakes of poison that blister where they fall from the deadly lips of the king is a new quality in our tragic verse ; there was no foretaste of such a thing in the passionate imagination which clothed itself in the mighty music of Marlowe's burning song. The elder master might indeed have written the magnificent speech which ushers in with gradual rhetoric and splendid reticence the black suggestion of a deed without a name ; his hand might have woven with no less imperial skill the elaborate raiment of words and images which wraps up in fold upon fold, as with swaddling-bands of purple and golden embroidery, the shapeless and miscreated birth of a murderous purpose that labours into light even while it loathes the light and itself ; but only Shakespeare could give us the first sample of that more secret and terrible knowledge which reveals itself in the brief heavy whispers that seal the commission and sign the warrant of the king. Webster alone of all our tragic poets has had strength to emulate in this darkest line of art the handiwork of his master. We find nowhere such an echo or reflection of the spirit of this scene as in the last

tremendous dialogue of Bosola with Ferdinand in the house of murder and madness, while their spotted souls yet flutter between conscience and distraction, hovering for an hour as with broken wings on the confines of either province of hell. One pupil at least could put to this awful profit the study of so great a model ; but with the single and sublime exception of that other design from the same great hand, which bares before us the mortal anguish of Bracciano, no copy or imitation of the scene in which John dies by poison has ever come near enough to evade the sentence it provokes. The shrill tremulous agony of Fletcher's Valentinian is to the sullen and slow death-pangs of Shakespeare's tyrant as the babble of a suckling to the accents of a man. As far beyond the reach of any but his maker's hand is the pattern of a perfect English warrior, set once for all before the eyes of all ages in the figure of the noble Bastard. The national side of Shakespeare's genius, the heroic vein of patriotism that runs like a thread of living fire through the world-wide range of his omnipresent spirit, has never, to my thinking, found vent or expression to such glorious purpose as here. Not even in Hotspur or Prince Hal has he mixed with more godlike sleight of hand all the lighter and graver good qualities of the national character, or compounded of them all so lovable a nature as this. In those others we admire and enjoy the same bright fiery temper of soul, the same buoyant and fearless mastery of fate or fortune, the same gladness and glory of life made lovely with all the labour and laughter of its full fresh days ; but no quality of theirs binds our hearts to them as they are bound to Philip—not by his loyal valour, his keen young wit, his kindness, constancy, readiness of service as swift and sure in the day of

his master's bitterest shame and shamefullest trouble as in the blithest hour of battle and that first good fight which won back his father's spoils from his father's slayer ; but more than all these, for that lightning of divine rage and pity, of tenderness that speaks in thunder and indignation that makes fire of its tears, in the horror of great compassion which falls on him, the tempest and storm of a beautiful and godlike anger which shakes his strength of spirit and bows his high heart down at sight of Arthur dead. Being thus, as he is, the English masterwork of Shakespeare's hand, we may well accept him as the best man known to us that England ever made ; the hero that Nelson must have been had he never come too near Naples.

I am not minded to say much of Shakespeare's Arthur ; there are one or two figures in the world of his work of which there are no words that would be fit or good to say. Another of these is Cordelia. The place they have in our lives and thoughts is not one for talk ; the niche set apart for them to inhabit in our secret hearts is not penetrable by the lights and noises of common day. There are chapels in the cathedral of man's highest art as in that of his inmost life, not made to be set open to the eyes and feet of the world. Love and death and memory keep charge for us in silence of some beloved names. It is the crowning glory of genius, the final miracle and transcendent gift of poetry, that it can add to the number of these, and engrave on the very heart of our remembrance fresh names and memories of its own creation.

There is one younger child in this heavenly family of Shakespeare's who sits side by side with Arthur in the secret places of our thought ; there are but

two or three that I remember among the children of other poets who may be named in the same year with them : as Fletcher's Hengo, Webster's Giovanni, and Landor's Cæsarion. Of this princely trinity of boys the 'bud of Britain' is as yet the most famous flower ; yet even in the broken words of childish heroism that falter on his dying lips there is nothing of more poignant pathos, more 'dearly sweet and bitter,' than Giovanni's talk of his dead mother and all her sleepless nights now ended for ever in a sleep beyond tears or dreams. Perhaps the most nearly faultless in finish and proportion of perfect nature among all the noble three is Landor's portrait of the imperial and right Roman child of Caesar and Cleopatra. I know not but this may be found in the judgment of men to come well-nigh the most pathetic and heroic figure bequeathed us after more than eighty years of a glorious life by the indomitable genius of our own last Roman and republican poet.

We have come now to that point at the opening of the second stage in his work where the supreme genius of all time begins first to meddle with the mysteries and varieties of human character, to handle its finer and more subtle qualities, to harmonise its more untuned and jarring discords ; giving here and thus the first proof of a power never shared in like measure by the mightiest among the sons of men, a sovereign and serene capacity to fathom the else unfathomable depths of spiritual nature, to solve its else insoluble riddles, to reconcile its else irreconcilable discrepancies. In his first stage Shakespeare had dropped his plummet no deeper into the sea of the spirit of man than Marlowe had sounded before him ; and in the channel of simple emotion no poet could cast surer line with steadier hand than he.

Further down in the dark and fiery depths of human pain and mortal passion no soul could search than his who first rendered into speech the aspirations and the agonies of a ruined and revolted spirit. And until Shakespeare found in himself the strength of eyesight to read and the cunning of handiwork to render those wider diversities of emotion and those further complexities of character which lay outside the range of Marlowe, he certainly cannot be said to have outrun the winged feet, outstripped the fiery flight of his forerunner. In the heaven of our tragic song the first-born star on the forehead of its herald god was not outshone till the full midsummer meridian of that greater godhead before whom he was sent to prepare a pathway for the sun. Through all the forenoon of our triumphant day, till the utter consummation and ultimate ascension of dramatic poetry incarnate and transfigured in the master-singer of the world, the quality of his tragedy was as that of Marlowe's, broad, single, and intense; large of hand, voluble of tongue, direct of purpose. With the dawn of its latter epoch a new power comes upon it, to find clothing and expression in new forms of speech and after a new style. The language has put off its foreign decorations of lyric and elegiac ornament; it has found already its infinite gain in the loss of those sweet superfluous graces which encumbered the march and enchain'd the utterance of its childhood. The figures which it invests are now no more the types of a single passion, the incarnations of a single thought. They now demand a scrutiny which tests the power of a mind and tries the value of a judgment; they appeal to something more than the instant apprehension which sufficed to respond to the immediate claim of those that went before them. Romeo and

Juliet were simply lovers, and their names bring back to us no further thought than of their love and the lovely sorrow of its end ; Antony and Cleopatra shall be before all things lovers, but the thought of their love and its triumphant tragedy shall recall other things beyond number—all the forces and all the fortunes of mankind, all the chance and all the consequence that waited on their imperial passion, all the infinite variety of qualities and powers wrought together and welded into the frame and composition of that love which shook from end to end all nations and kingdoms of the earth.

The same truth holds good in lighter matters ; Biron and Rosaline in comedy are as simply lovers and no more as were their counterparts and coevals in tragedy : there is more in Benedick and Beatrice than this simple quality of love that clothes itself in the strife of wits ; the injury done her cousin, which by the repercussion of its shock and refraction of its effect serves to transfigure with such adorable indignation and ardour of furious love and pity the whole bright light nature of Beatrice, serves likewise by a fresh reflection and counter-change of its consequence to exalt and enlarge the stature of her lover's spirit after a fashion beyond the reach of Shakespeare in his first stage. Mercutio again, like Philip, is a good friend and gallant swordsman, quick-witted and hot-blooded, of a fiery and faithful temper, loyal and light and swift alike of speech and swordstroke ; and this is all. But the character of the Bastard, clear and simple as broad sunlight though it be, has in it other features than this single and beautiful likeness of frank young manhood ; his love of country and loathing of the Church that would bring it into subjection are two sides of the same national quality

that has made and will always make every Englishman of his type such another as he was in belief and in unbelief, patriot and priest-hater ; and no part of the design bears such witness to the full-grown perfection of his creator's power and skill as the touch that combines and fuses into absolute unity of concord the high and various elements of faith in England, loyalty to the wretched lord who has made him knight and acknowledged him kinsman, contempt for his abjection at the foul feet of the Church, abhorrence of his crime and constancy to his cause for something better worth the proof of war than his miserable sake who hardly can be roused, even by such exhortation as might put life and spirit into the dust of dead men's bones, to bid his betters stand and strike in defence of the country dishonoured by his reign.

It is this new element of variety in unity, this study of the complex and diverse shades in a single nature, which requires from any criticism worth attention some inquisition of character as complement to the investigation of style. Analysis of any sort would be inapplicable to the actors who bear their parts in the comic, the tragic or historic plays of the first period. There is nothing in them to analyse ; they are, as we have seen, like all the characters represented by Marlowe, the embodiments or the exponents of single qualities and simple forces. The question of style also is therefore so far a simple question ; but with the change and advance in thought and all matter of spiritual study and speculation this question also becomes complex, and inseparable, if we would pursue it to any good end, from the analysis of character and subject. In the debate on which we are now to enter, the question of style and the question of character, or as we might say the ques-

tions of matter and of spirit, are more than ever indivisible from each other, more inextricably inwoven than elsewhere into the one most difficult question of authorship which has ever been disputed in the dense and noisy school or fought out in the wide and windy field of Shakespearean controversy.

There can be few serious students of Shakespeare who have not sometimes felt that possibly the hardest problem involved in their study is that which requires for its solution some reasonable and acceptable theory as to the play of *King Henry VIII*. None such has ever yet been offered ; and I certainly cannot pretend to supply one. Perhaps however it may be possible to do some service by an attempt to disprove what is untenable, even though it should not be possible to produce in its stead any positive proof of what we may receive as matter of absolute faith.

The veriest tiro in criticism who knows anything of the subject in hand must perceive, what is certainly not beyond a schoolboy's range of vision, that the metre and the language of this play are in great part so like the language and the metre of Fletcher that the first and easiest inference would be to assume the partnership of that poet in the work. In former days it was Jonson whom the critics and commentators of their time saw good to select as the colleague or the editor of Shakespeare ; but a later school of criticism has resigned the notion that the fifth act was retouched and adjusted by the author of *Volpone* to the taste of his patron James. The later theory is more plausible than this ; the primary objection to it is that it is too facile and superficial. It is waste of time to point out what any intelligent and imaginative child with a tolerable ear for metre who had read a little of the one and the other poet could see

for himself—that much of the play is externally as like the usual style of Fletcher as it is unlike the usual style of Shakespeare. The question is whether we can find one scene, one speech, one passage, which in spirit, in scope, in purpose, bears the same or any comparable resemblance to the work of Fletcher. I doubt if any man more warmly admires a poet whom few can have studied more thoroughly than I ; and to whom, in spite of all sins of omission and commission,—and many and grievous they are, beyond the plenary absolution of even the most indulgent among critical confessors,—I constantly return with a fresh sense of attraction, which is constantly rewarded by a fresh sense of gratitude and delight. It is assuredly from no wish to pluck a leaf from his laurel, which has no need of foreign grafts or stolen garlands from the loftier growth of Shakespeare's, that I have ventured to question his capacity for the work assigned to him by recent criticism. The speech of Buckingham, for example, on his way to execution, is of course at first sight very like the finest speeches of the kind in Fletcher ; here is the same smooth and fluent declamation, the same prolonged and persistent melody, which if not monotonous is certainly not various ; the same pure, lucid, perspicuous flow of simple rather than strong, and elegant rather than exquisite English ; and yet, if we set it against the best examples of the kind which may be selected from such tragedies as *Bonduca* or *The False One*, against the rebuke addressed by Caratach to his cousin or by Cæsar to the murderers of Pompey—and no finer instances of tragic declamation can be chosen from the work of this great master of rhetorical dignity and pathos—I cannot but think we shall perceive in it a comparative severity and

elevation which will be missed when we turn back from it to the text of Fletcher. There is an aptness of phrase, an abstinence from excess, a 'plentiful lack' of mere flowery and superfluous beauties, which we may rather wish than hope to find in the most famous of Shakespeare's successors. But if not his work, we may be sure it was his model ; a model which he often approached, which he often studied, but which he never attained. It is never for absolute truth and fitness of expression, it is always for eloquence and sweetness, for fluency and fancy, that we find the tragic scenes of Fletcher most praiseworthy ; and the motive or mainspring of interest is usually anything but natural or simple. Now the motive here is as simple, the emotion as natural as possible ; the author is content to dispense with all the violent or far-fetched or fantastic excitement from which Fletcher could hardly ever bring himself completely to abstain. I am not speaking here of those tragedies in which the hand of Beaumont is traceable ; to these, I need hardly say, the charge is comparatively inapplicable which may fairly be brought against the unassisted works of his elder colleague ; but in any of the typical tragedies of Fletcher, in *Thierry and Theodore*, in *Valentinian*, in *The Double Marriage*, the scenes which for power and beauty of style may reasonably be compared with this of the execution of Buckingham will be found more forced in situation, more fanciful in language than this. Many will be found more beautiful, many more exciting ; the famous interview of Thierry with the veiled Ordella, and the scene answering to this in the fifth act where Brunhalt is confronted with her dying son, will be at once remembered by all dramatic students ; and the parts of Lucina and Juliana may each be described as a

continuous arrangement of passionate and pathetic effects. But in which of these parts and in which of these plays shall we find a scene so simple, an effect so modest, a situation so unforced as here? where may we look for the same temperance of tone, the same control of excitement, the same steadiness of purpose? If indeed Fletcher could have written this scene, or the farewell of Wolsey to his greatness, or his parting scene with Cromwell, he was perhaps not a greater poet, but he certainly was a tragic writer capable of loftier self-control and severer self-command, than he has ever shown himself elsewhere.

And yet, if this were all, we might be content to believe that the dignity of the subject and the high example of his present associate had for once lifted the natural genius of Fletcher above itself. But the fine and subtle criticism of Mr. Spedding has in the main, I think, successfully and clearly indicated the lines of demarcation undeniably discernible in this play between the severer style of certain scenes or speeches and the laxer and more fluid style of others; between the graver, solider, more condensed parts of the apparently composite work, and those which are clearer, thinner, more diffused and diluted in expression. If under the latter head we had to class such passages only as the dying speech of Buckingham and the christening speech of Cranmer, it might after all be almost impossible to resist the internal evidence of Fletcher's handiwork. Certainly we hear the same soft continuous note of easy eloquence, level and limpid as a stream of crystalline transparency, in the plaintive adieu of the condemned statesman and the panegyrical prophecy of the favoured prelate. If this, I say, were all, we might admit that there is nothing—I have already admitted it—in either passage

beyond the poetic reach of Fletcher. But on the hypothesis so ably maintained by the editor of Bacon there hangs no less a consequence than this : that we must assign to the same hand the crowning glory of the whole poem, the death-scene of Katherine. Now if Fletcher could have written that scene—a scene on which the only criticism ever passed, the only commendation ever bestowed, by the verdict of successive centuries, has been that of tears and silence—if Fletcher could have written a scene so far beyond our applause, so far above our acclamation, then the memory of no great poet has ever been so grossly wronged, so shamefully defrauded of its highest claim to honour. But, with all reverence for that memory, I must confess that I cannot bring myself to believe it. Any explanation appears to me more probable than this. Considering with what care every relic of his work was once and again collected by his posthumous editors—even to the attribution, not merely of plays in which he can have taken only the slightest part, but of plays in which we know that he had no share at all—I cannot believe that his friends would have let by far the brightest jewel in his crown rest unreclaimed in the then less popular treasure-house of Shakespeare. Belief or disbelief of this kind is however but a sandy soil for conjecture to build upon. Whether or not his friends would have reclaimed for him the credit of this scene, had they known it (as they must have known it) to be his due, I must repeat that such a miraculous example of a man's genius for once transcending itself and for ever eclipsing all its other achievements appears to me beyond all critical, beyond all theological credulity. Pathos and concentration are surely not among the dominant notes of Fletcher's style or the salient

qualities of his intellect. Except perhaps in the beautiful and famous passage where Hengo dies in his uncle's arms, I doubt whether in any of the variously and highly coloured scenes played out upon the wide and shifting stage of his fancy the genius of Fletcher has ever unlocked the source of tears. Bellario and Aspatia were the children of his younger colleague ; at least, after the death of Beaumont we meet no such figures on the stage of Fletcher. In effect, though Beaumont had a gift of grave sardonic humour which found especial vent in burlesques of the heroic style and in the systematic extravagance of such characters as Bessus,¹ yet he was above all things a tragic poet ; and though Fletcher had great power of tragic eloquence and passionate effusion, yet his comic genius was of a rarer and more precious quality ; one *Spanish Curate* is worth many a *Valentineian* ; as, on the other hand, one *Philaster* is worth many a *Scornful Lady*. Now there is no question here of Beaumont ; and there is no question that the passage here debated has been taken to the heart of the whole world and baptized in the tears of generations as no work of Fletcher's has ever been. That Beaumont could have written it I do not believe ; but I am well-nigh assured that Fletcher could not. I can scarcely imagine that the most fluid sympathy, the 'hysteric passion' most easily distilled from the

¹ Compare with Beaumont's admirable farce of Bessus the wretched imitation of it attempted after his death in the *Nice Valour* of Fletcher ; whose proper genius was neither for pure tragedy nor broad farce, but for high comedy and heroic romance—a field of his own invention ; witness *Monsieur Thomas* and *The Knight of Malta* : while Beaumont has approved himself in tragedy all but the worthiest disciple of Shakespeare, in farce beyond all comparison the aptest pupil of Jonson. He could give us no *Fox* or *Alchemist* ; but the inventor of Bessus and Calianax was worthy of the esteem and affection returned to him by the creator of Morose and Rabbi Busy.

eyes of reader or spectator, can ever have watered with its tears the scene or the page which sets forth, however eloquently and effectively, the sorrows and heroisms of Ordella, Juliana, or Lucina. Every success but this I can well believe them, as they assuredly deserve, to have attained.

To this point then we haye come, as to the crucial point at issue ; and looking back upon those passages of the play which first suggest the handiwork of Fletcher, and which certainly do now and then seem almost identical in style with his, I think we shall hardly find the difference between these and other parts of the same play so wide and so distinct as the difference between the undoubted work of Fletcher and the undoubted work of Shakespeare. What that difference is we are fortunately able to determine with exceptional certitude, and with no supplementary help from conjecture of probabilities. In the play which is undoubtedly a joint work of these poets the points of contact and the points of disunion are unmistakable by the youngest eye. In the very last scene of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, we can tell with absolute certainty what speeches were appended or interpolated by Fletcher ; we can pronounce with positive conviction what passages were completed and what parts were left unfinished by Shakespeare. Even on Mr. Spedding's theory it can hardly be possible to do as much for *King Henry VIII*. The lines of demarcation, however visible or plausible, are fainter by far than these. It is certainly not much less strange to come upon such passages in the work of Shakespeare as the speeches of Buckingham and Cranmer than it would be to encounter in the work of Sophocles a sample of the later and laxer style of Euripides ; to meet for instance in the *Antigone*

with a passage which might pass muster as an extract from the *Iphigenia in Aulis*. In metrical effects the style of the lesser English poet is an exact counterpart of the style of the lesser Greek ; there is the same comparative tenuity and fluidity of verse, the same excess of short unemphatic syllables, the same solution of the graver iambic into soft overflow of lighter and longer feet which relaxes and dilutes the solid harmony of tragic metre with notes of a more facile and feminine strain. But in *King Henry VIII.* it should be remarked that though we not unfrequently find the same preponderance as in Fletcher's work of verses with a double ending—which in English verse at least are not in themselves feminine, and need not be taken to constitute, as in Fletcher's case they do, a note of comparative effeminacy or relaxation in tragic style—we do not find the perpetual predominance of those triple terminations so peculiarly and notably dear to that poet ;¹ so that even by the test of the metre-mongers who would reduce the whole question at issue to a point which might at once be solved by the simple process of numeration the argument in favour of Fletcher can hardly be proved tenable ; for the metre which evidently has one leading quality in common with his is as evidently

¹ A desperate attempt has been made to support the metrical argument in favour of Fletcher's authorship by the production of a list in which such words as *slavery*, *emperor*, *pitying*, *difference*, and even *Christians*, were actually registered as trisyllabic terminations. To such unimaginable shifts are critics of the finger-counting or syllabic school inevitably and fatally reduced in the effort to establish by rule of thumb even so much as may seem verifiable by that rule in the province of poetical criticism. Prosody is at best no more than the skeleton of verse, as verse is the body of poetry ; while the gain of such painful labourers in a field they know not how to till is not even a skeleton of worthless or irrelevant fact, but the shadow of such a skeleton reflected in water. It would seem that critics who hear only through their fingers have not even fingers to hear with.

wanting in another at least as marked and as necessary to establish—if established it can be by any such test taken singly and apart from all other points of evidence—the collaboration of Fletcher with Shakespeare in this instance. And if the proof by mere metrical similitude is thus imperfect, there is here assuredly no other kind of test which may help to fortify the argument by any suggestion of weight even comparable to this. In those passages which would seem most plausibly to indicate the probable partnership of Fletcher, the unity and sustained force of the style keep it generally above the average level of his ; there is less admixture or intrusion of lyric or elegiac quality ; there is more of temperance and proportion alike in declamation and in debate. And throughout the whole play, and under all the diversity of composite subject and conflicting interest which disturbs the unity of action, there is a singleness of spirit, a general unity or concord of inner tone, in marked contrast to the utter discord and discrepancy of the several sections of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. We admit, then, that this play offers us in some not unimportant passages the single instance of a style not elsewhere precisely or altogether traceable in Shakespeare ; that no exact parallel to it can be found among his other plays ; and that if not the partial work it may certainly be taken as the general model of Fletcher in his tragic poetry. On the other hand, we contend that its exceptional quality might perhaps be explicable as a tentative essay in a new line by one who tried so many styles before settling into his latest ; and that, without far stronger, clearer, and completer proof than has yet been or can ever be advanced, the question is not solved but merely evaded by the assumption of a double authorship.

By far the ablest argument based upon a wider ground of reason or of likelihood than this of mere metre that has yet been advanced in support of the theory which would attribute a part of this play to some weaker hand than Shakespeare's is due to the study of a critic whose name—already by right of inheritance the most illustrious name of his age and ours—is now for ever attached to that of Shakespeare himself by right of the highest service ever done and the noblest duty ever paid to his memory. The untimely death which removed beyond reach of our thanks for all he had done and our hopes for all he might do the man who first had given to France the first among foreign poets—son of the greatest Frenchman and translator of the greatest Englishman—was only in this not untimely, that it forbore him till the great and wonderful work was done which has bound two deathless names together by a closer than the common link that connects the names of all sovereign poets. Among all classic translations of the classic works of the world, I know of none that for absolute mastery and perfect triumph over all accumulation of obstacles, for supreme dominion over supreme difficulty, can be matched with the translation of Shakespeare by François-Victor Hugo; unless a claim of companionship may perchance be put in for Urquhart's unfinished version of Rabelais. For such success in the impossible as finally disproves the right of 'that fool of a word' to existence—at least in the world of letters—the two miracles of study and of sympathy which have given Shakespeare to the French and Rabelais to the English, and each in his habit as he lived, may take rank together in glorious rivalry beyond eyeshot of all past or future competition.

Among the essays appended to the version of

Shakespeare which they complete and illustrate, that which deals with the play now in question gives as ample proof as any other of the sound and subtle insight brought to bear by the translator upon the object of his labour and his love. His keen and studious intuition is here as always not less notable and admirable than his large and solid knowledge, his full and lucid comprehension at once of the text and of the history of Shakespeare's plays; and if his research into the inner details of that history may seem ever to have erred from the straight path of firm and simple certainty into some dubious by-way of theory or conjecture, we may be sure at least that no lack of learning or devotion, of ardour or intelligence, but more probably some noble thought that was fathered by a noble wish to do honour to Shakespeare, has led him to attribute to his original some quality foreign to the text, or to question the authenticity of what for love of his author he might not wish to find in it. Thus he would reject the main part of the fifth act as the work of a mere court laureate, an official hack or hireling employed to anoint the memory of an archbishop and lubricate the steps of a throne with the common oil of dramatic adulation; and finding it in either case a task alike unworthy of Shakespeare to glorify the name of Cranmer or to deify the names of the queen then dead and the king yet living, it is but natural that he should be induced by an unconscious bias or pre-possession of the will to depreciate the worth of the verse spent on work fitter for ushers and embalmers and the general valetry or varletry of Church and State. That this fifth act is unequal in point of interest to the better part of the preceding acts with which it is connected by so light and loose a tie of

convenience is as indisputable as that the style of the last scene savours now and then, and for some space together, more strongly than ever of Fletcher's most especial and distinctive qualities, or that the whole structure of the play if judged by any strict rule of pure art is incomposite and incongruous, wanting in unity, consistency, and coherence of interest. The fact is that here even more than in *King John* the poet's hands were hampered by a difficulty inherent in the subject. To an English and Protestant audience, fresh from the passions and perils of reformation and reaction, he had to present an English king at war with the papacy, in whom the assertion of national independence was incarnate ; and to the sympathies of such an audience it was a matter of mere necessity for him to commend the representative champion of their cause by all means which he could compel into the service of his aim. Yet this object was in both instances all but incompatible with the natural and necessary interest of the plot. It was inevitable that this interest should in the main be concentrated upon the victims of the personal or national policy of either king ; upon Constance and Arthur, upon Katherine and Wolsey. Where these are not, either apparent in person on the stage, or felt in their influence upon the speech and action of the characters present, the pulse of the poem beats fainter and its forces begin to flag. In *King John* this difficulty was met and mastered, these double claims of the subject of the poem and the object of the poet were satisfied and harmonised, by the effacement of John and the substitution of Faulconbridge as the champion of the national cause and the protagonist of the dramatic action. Considering this play in its double aspect of tragedy and history,

we might say that the English hero becomes the central figure of the poem as seen from its historic side, while John remains the central figure of the poem as seen from its tragic side ; the personal interest that depends on personal crime and retribution is concentrated on the agony of the king ; the national interest which he, though the eponymous hero of the poem, was alike inadequate as a craven and improper as a villain to sustain and represent in the eyes of the spectators was happily and easily transferred to the one person of the play who could properly express within the compass of its closing act at once the protest against papal pretension, the defiance of foreign invasion, and the prophetic assurance of self-dependent life and self-sufficing strength inherent in the nation then fresh from a fiercer trial of its quality, which an audience of the days of Queen Elizabeth would justly expect from the poet who undertook to set before them in action the history of the days of King John. That history had lately been brought upon the stage under the hottest and most glaring light that could be thrown on it by the fire of fanatical partisanship ; *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, weakest and most wooden of all wearisome chronicles that ever cumbered the boards, had in it for sole principle of life its power of congenial appeal to the same blatant and vulgar spirit of Protestantism which inspired it. In all the flat interminable morass of its tedious and tuneless verse I can find no blade or leaf of living poetic growth, no touch but one of nature or of pathos, where Arthur dying would fain send a last thought in search of his mother. From this play Shakespeare can have got neither hint nor help towards the execution of his own ; the crude rough sketch of the Bastard as he

brawls and swaggers through the long length of its scenes is hardly so much as the cast husk or chrysalid of the noble creature which was to arise and take shape for ever at the transfiguring touch of Shakespeare. In the case of *King Henry VIII.* he had not even such a blockish model as this to work from. The one preceding play known to me which deals professedly with the same subject treats of quite other matters than are handled by Shakespeare, and most notably with the scholastic adventures or misadventures of Edward Prince of Wales and his whipping-boy Ned Browne. A fresh and well-nigh a plausible argument might be raised by the critics who deny the unity of authorship in *King Henry VIII.*, on the ground that if Shakespeare had completed the work himself he would surely not have let slip the occasion to introduce one of the most famous and popular of all court fools in the person of Will Summers ; who might have given life and relief to the action of many scenes now unvaried and unbroken in their gravity of emotion and event. Shakespeare, one would say, might naturally have been expected to take up and remodel the well-known figure of which his humble precursor could give but a rough thin outline, yet sufficient it should seem to attract the tastes to which it appealed ; for this or some other quality of seasonable attraction served to float the now forgotten play of Samuel Rowley through several editions. The central figure of the huge hot-headed king, with his gusts of stormy good humour and peals of burly oaths which might have suited ' Garagantua's mouth ' and satisfied the requirements of Hotspur, appeals in a ruder fashion to the survival of the same sympathies on which Shakespeare with a finer instinct as evidently relied ; the popular

estimate of the bluff and brawny tyrant ' who broke the bonds of Rome ' was not yet that of later historians, though doubtless neither was it that of the writer or writers who would champion him to the utterance. Perhaps the opposite verdicts given by the instinct of the people on 'bluff King Hal' and 'Bloody Mary' may be understood by reference to a famous verse of Juvenal. The wretched queen was sparing of noble blood and lavish of poor men's lives—*cerdonibus timenda*; and the curses under which her memory was buried were spared by the people to her father, *Lamiarum cæde madenti*. In any case, the humblest not less than the highest of the poets who wrote under the reign of his daughter found it safe to present him in a popular light before an audience of whose general pre-possession in his favour William Shakespeare was no slower to take advantage than Samuel Rowley.

The two plays we have just discussed have one quality of style in common which has already been noted; that in them rhetoric is in excess of action or passion, and far in excess of poetry. They are not as yet perfect examples of his second manner, though far ahead of his first stage in performance as in promise. Compared with the full and living figure of Katherine or of Constance, the study of Margaret of Anjou is the mere sketch of a poet still in his pupilage: John and Henry, Faulconbridge and Wolsey, are designs beyond reach of the hand which drew the second and third Richard without much background or dramatic perspective. But the difficulties inherent in either subject are not surmounted throughout with absolute equality of success; the very point of appeal to the sympathy and excitement of the time may have been something of a disturbing force in the composition of the work—

a loadstone rock indeed, of tempting attraction to the patriot as well as to the playwright, but possibly capable of proving in some measure a rock of offence to the poet whose ship was piloted towards it. His perfect triumph in the field of patriotic drama, coincident with the perfect maturity of his comic genius and his general style, has now to show itself.

The great national trilogy which is at once the flower of Shakespeare's second period and the crown of his achievements in historic drama—unless indeed we so far depart from the established order and arrangement of his works as to include his three Roman plays in the same class with these English histories—offers perhaps the most singular example known to us of the variety in fortune which befell his works on their first appearance in print. None of these had better luck in that line at starting than *King Henry IV.*; none had worse than *King Henry V.* With *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Hamlet*, it shares the remarkable and undesirable honour of having been seized and boarded by pirates even before it had left the dockyard. The master-builder's hands had not yet put the craft into seaworthy condition when she was overhauled by these Kidds and Blackbeards of the press. Of those four plays, the two tragedies at least were thoroughly recast, and rewritten from end to end: the pirated editions giving us a transcript, more or less perfect or imperfect, accurate or corrupt, of the text as it first came from the poet's hand; a text to be afterwards indefinitely modified and incalculably improved. Not quite so much can be said of the comedy, which certainly stood in less need of revision, and probably would not have borne it so well; nevertheless every little passing touch of the reviser's hand is here also

a noticeable mark of invigoration and improvement. But *King Henry V.*, we may fairly say, is hardly less than transformed. Not that it has been recast after the fashion of *Hamlet*, or even rewritten after the fashion of *Romeo and Juliet*; but the corruptions and imperfections of the pirated text are here more flagrant than in any other instance; while the general revision of style by which it is at once purified and fortified extends to every nook and corner of the restored and renovated building. Even had we, however, a perfect and trustworthy transcript of Shakespeare's original sketch for this play, there can be little doubt that the rough draught would still prove almost as different from the final masterpiece as is the soiled and ragged canvas now before us, on which we trace the outline of figures so strangely disfigured, made subject to such rude extremities of defacement and defeature. There is indeed less difference between the two editions in the comic than in the historic scenes; the pirates were probably more careful to furnish their market with a fair sample of the lighter than of the graver ware supplied by their plunder of the poet; Fluellen and Pistol lose less through their misusage than the king; and the king himself is less maltreated when he talks plain prose with his soldiers than when he chops blank verse with his enemies or his lords. His rough and ready courtship of the French princess is a good deal expanded as to length, but (if I dare say so) less improved and heightened in tone than we might well have wished and it might well have borne; in either text the hero's addresses savour rather of a ploughman than a prince, and his finest courtesies are clownish though not churlish. We may probably see in this rather a concession to the

appetite of the groundlings than an evasion of the difficulties inherent in the subject-matter of the scene ; too heavy as these might have been for another, we can conceive of none too hard for the magnetic tact and intuitive delicacy of Shakespeare's judgment and instinct. But it must fairly and honestly be admitted that in this scene we find as little of the charm and humour inseparable from the prince as of the courtesy and dignity to be expected from the king.

It should on the other hand be noted that the finest touch in the comic scenes, if not the finest in the whole portrait of Falstaff, is apparently an afterthought, a touch added on revision of the original design. In the first scene of the second act Mrs. Quickly's remark that ' he'll yield the crow a pudding one of these days ' is common to both versions of the play ; but the six words following are only to be found in the revised edition ; and these six words the very pirates could hardly have passed over or struck out. They are not such as can drop from the text of a poet unperceived by the very dullest and horniest of human eyes. 'The king has killed his heart.' Here is the point in Falstaff's nature so strangely overlooked by the man of all men who we should have said must be the first to seize and to appreciate it. It is as grievous as it is inexplicable that the Shakespeare of France—the most infinite in compassion, in 'conscience and tender heart,' of all great poets in all ages and all nations of the world—should have missed the deep tenderness of this supreme and subtlest touch in the work of the greatest among his fellows. Again, with anything but 'damnable' iteration, does Shakespeare revert to it before the close of this very scene. Even Pistol and Nym can see that what now ails their old master is no such

ailment as in his prosperous days was but too liable to 'play the rogue with his great toe.' 'The king hath run bad humours on the knight': 'his heart is fracted, and corroborate.' And it is not thus merely through the eclipse of that brief mirage, that fair prospect 'of Africa, and golden joys,' in view of which he was ready to 'take any man's horses.' This it is that distinguishes Falstaff from Panurge; that lifts him at least to the moral level of Sancho Panza. I cannot but be reluctant to set the verdict of my own judgment against that of Victor Hugo's; I need none to remind me what and who he is whose judgment I for once oppose, and what and who am I that I should oppose it; that he is he, and I am but myself; yet against his classification of Falstaff, against his definition of Shakespeare's unapproached and unapproachable masterpiece in the school of comic art and humoristic nature, I must and do with all my soul and strength protest. The admirable phrase of 'swine-centaur' (*centaure du porc*) is as inapplicable to Falstaff as it is appropriate to Panurge. Not the third person but the first in date of that divine and human trinity of humourists whose names make radiant for ever the century of their new-born glory—not Shakespeare but Rabelais is responsible for the creation or the discovery of such a type as this. '*Suum cuique* is our Roman justice'; the gradation from Panurge to Falstaff is not downward but upward; though it be Victor Hugo's very self who asserts the contrary.¹ Singular as may seem the collocation of the epithet 'moral' with the name 'Falstaff,' I venture to maintain my thesis; that in

¹ 'La dynastie du bon sens, inaugurée dans Panurge, continuée dans Sancho Pança, tourne à mal et avorte dans Falstaff.'—(William Shakespeare, deuxième partie, livre premier, ch. ii.)

point of feeling, and therefore of possible moral elevation, Falstaff is as undeniably the superior of Sancho as Sancho is unquestionably the superior of Panurge. The natural affection of Panurge is bounded by the self-same limits as the natural theology of Polyphe-mus ; the love of the one, like the faith of the other, begins and ends alike at one point ;

Myself,
And this great belly, first of deities ;

(in which line, by the way, we may hear as it were a first faint prelude of the great proclamation to come—the hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the coronation day of King Gaster ; whose laureate, we know, was as lovingly familiar with the Polyphe-mus of Euripides as Shakespeare with his own Pantagruel). In Sancho we come upon a creature capable of love—but not of such love as kills or helps to kill, such love as may end or even as may seem to end in anything like heartbreak. ‘ And now abideth Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, these three ; but the greatest of these is Shakespeare.’

I would fain score yet another point in the fat knight’s favour ; ‘ I have much to say in the behalf of that Falstaff.’ Rabelais, evangelist and prophet of the Resurrection of the Flesh (so long entombed, ignored, repudiated, misconstrued, vilified, by so many generations and ages of Galilean preachers and Pharisaic schoolmen)—Rabelais was content to paint the flesh merely, in its honest human reality—human at least, if also bestial ; in its frank and rude reaction against the half brainless and wholly bloodless teachers whose doctrine he himself on the one hand, and Luther on the other, arose together to smite severally—to smite them hip and thigh,

even till the going down of the sun ; the mock sun or marshy meteor that served only to deepen the darkness encompassing on every side the doubly dark ages—the ages of monarchy and theocracy, the ages of death and of faith. To Panurge, therefore, it was unnecessary and it might have seemed inconsequent to attribute other gifts or functions than are proper to such intelligence as may accompany the appetites of an animal. That most irreverend father in God, Friar John, belongs to a higher class in the moral order of being ; and he much rather than his fellow-voyager and penitent is properly comparable with Falstaff. It is impossible to connect the notion of rebuke with the sins of Panurge. The actual lust and gluttony, the imaginary cowardice of Falstaff, have been gravely and sharply rebuked by critical morality ; we have just noted a too recent and too eminent example of this ; but what mortal ever dreamed of casting these qualities in the teeth of his supposed counterpart ? The difference is as vast between Falstaff on the field of battle and Panurge on the storm-tossed deck as between Falstaff and Hotspur, Panurge and Friar John. No man could show cooler and steadier nerve than is displayed in either case—by the lay as well as the clerical namesake of the fourth evangelist. If ever fruitless but endless care was shown to prevent misunderstanding, it was shown in the pains taken by Shakespeare to obviate the misconstruction which would impute to Falstaff the quality of a Parolles or a Bobadil, a Bessus or a Moron. The delightful encounter between the jester and the bear in the crowning interlude of *La Princesse d'Élide* shows once more, I may remark, that Molière had sat at the feet of Rabelais as delightedly as Shakespeare before him. Such rapturous inebriety

or Olympian incontinence of humour only fires the blood of the graver and less exuberant humourist when his lips are still warm and wet from the well-spring of the *Dive Bouteille*.

It is needless to do over again the work which was done, and well done, a hundred years since, by the writer whose able essay in vindication and exposition of the genuine character of Falstaff elicited from Dr. Johnson as good a jest and as bad a criticism as might have been expected. His argument is too thoroughly carried out at all points and fortified on all hands to require or even to admit of corroboration ; and the attempt to appropriate any share of the lasting credit which is his due would be nothing less than a disingenuous impertinence. I may here however notice that in the very first scene of this trilogy which introduces us to the ever dear and honoured presence of Sir John, his creator has put into the mouth of a witness no friendlier or more candid than Ned Poins the distinction between two as true-bred cowards as ever turned back and one who will fight no longer than he sees reason. In this nutshell lies the whole kernel of the matter ; the sweet, sound, ripe, toothsome, wholesome kernel of Falstaff's character and humour. He will fight as well as his princely patron, and, like the prince, as long as he sees reason ; but neither Hal nor Jack has ever felt any touch of desire to pluck that ' mere scutcheon ' honour ' from the pale-faced moon.' Harry Percy is as it were the true Sir Bedivere, the last of all Arthurian knights ; Henry V. is the first as certainly as he is the noblest of those equally daring and calculating statesmen-warriors whose two most terrible, most perfect, and most famous types are Louis XI. and Cæsar Borgia. Gain, ' com-

modity,' the principle of self-interest which never but in word and in jest could become the principle of action with Faulconbridge,—himself already far more 'a man of this world' than a Launcelot or a Hotspur,—is as evidently the mainspring of Henry's enterprise and life as of the contract between King Philip and King John. The supple and shameless egotism of the churchmen on whose political sophistries he relies for external support is needed rather to varnish his project than to reassure his conscience. Like Frederic the Great before his first Silesian war, the future conqueror of Agincourt has practically made up his mind before he seeks to find as good reason or as plausible excuse as were likewise to suffice the future conqueror of Rosbach. In a word, Henry is doubtless not the man, as old Auchindrane expresses it in the noble and strangely neglected tragedy which bears solitary but sufficient witness to the actual dramatic faculty of Sir Walter Scott's genius, to do the devil's work without his wages; but neither is he, on the like unprofitable terms, by any manner of means the man to do God's. No completer incarnation could be shown us of the militant Englishman—*Anglais pur sang*; but it is not only, as some have seemed to think, with the highest, the purest, the noblest quality of English character that his just and far-seeing creator has endowed him. The godlike equity of Shakespeare's judgment, his implacable and impeccable righteousness of instinct and of insight, was too deeply ingrained in the very core of his genius to be perverted by any provincial or pseudo-patriotic prepossessions; his patriotism was too national to be provincial. Assuredly no poet ever had more than he: not even the king of men and poets who fought at Marathon and

sang of Salamis : much less had any or has any one of our own, from Milton on to Campbell and from Campbell even to Tennyson. In the mightiest chorus of *King Henry V.* we hear the pealing ring of the same great English trumpet that was yet to sound over the battle of the Baltic, and again in our later day over a sea-fight of Shakespeare's own, more splendid and heart-cheering in its calamity than that other and all others in their triumph ; a war-song and a sea-song divine and deep as death or as the sea, making thrice more glorious at once the glorious three names of England, of Grenville, and of Tennyson for ever. From the affectation of cosmopolitan indifference not Æschylus, not Pindar, not Dante's very self was more alien or more free than Shakespeare ; but there was nothing of the dry Tyrtaean twang, the dull mechanic resonance as of wooden echoes from a platform, in the great historic chord of his lyre. ' He is very English, too English, even,' says the Master on whom his enemies alone—assuredly not his most loving, most reverent, and most thankful disciples—might possibly and plausibly retort that he was ' very French, too French, even ' ; but he certainly was not ' too English ' to see and cleave to the main fact, the radical and central truth, of personal or national character, of typical history or tradition, without seeking to embellish, to degrade, in either or in any way to falsify it. From king to king, from cardinal to cardinal, from the earliest in date of subject to the latest of his histories, we find the same thread running, the same link of honourable and righteous judgment, of equitable and careful equanimity, connecting and combining play with play in an unbroken and infrangible chain of evidence to the singleness of the poet's eye, the identity of the work-

man's hand, which could do justice and would do no more than justice, alike to Henry and to Wolsey, to Pandulph and to John. His typical English hero or historic protagonist is a man of their type who founded and built up the empire of England in India ; a hero after the future pattern of Hastings and of Clive ; not less daringly sagacious and not more delicately scrupulous, not less indomitable or more impeccable than they. A type by no means immaculate, a creature not at all too bright and good for English nature's daily food in times of mercantile or military enterprise ; no whit more if no whit less excellent and radiant than reality. *Amica Britannia, sed magis amica veritas.* The master poet of England—all Englishmen may reasonably and honourably be proud of it—has not two weights and two measures for friend and foe. This palpable and patent fact, as his only and worthy French translator has well remarked, would of itself suffice to exonerate his memory from the imputation of having perpetrated in its evil entirety *The First Part of King Henry VI.*

There is, in my opinion, somewhat more of internal evidence than I have ever seen adduced in support of the tradition current from an early date as to the origin of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* ; a tradition which assigns to Queen Elizabeth the same office of midwife with regard to this comedy as was discharged by Elwood with reference to *Paradise Regained*. Nothing could so naturally or satisfactorily explain its existence as the expression of a desire to see ' Falstaff in love,' which must have been nothing less than the equivalent of a command to produce him under the disguise of such a transfiguration on the boards. The task of presenting him so shorn of his beams, so much less than archangel (of comedy)

ruined, and the excess of (humorous) glory obscured, would hardly, we cannot but think and feel, have spontaneously suggested itself to Shakespeare as a natural or eligible aim for the fresh exercise of his comic genius. To exhibit Falstaff as throughout the whole course of five acts a credulous and baffled dupe, one 'easier to be played on than a pipe,' was not really to reproduce him at all. The genuine Falstaff could no more have played such a part than the genuine Petruchio could have filled such an one as was assigned him by Fletcher in the luckless hour when that misguided poet undertook to continue the subject and to correct the moral of the next comedy in our catalogue of Shakespeare's. *The Tamer Tamed* is hardly less consistent or acceptable as a sequel to *The Taming of the Shrew* than *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as a supplement to *King Henry IV.*: and no conceivable comparison could more forcibly convey how broad and deep is the gulf of incongruity which divides them.

The plea for once suggested by the author in the way of excuse or extenuation for this incompatibility of Falstaff with Falstaff—for the violation of character goes far beyond mere inconsistency or the natural ebb and flow of even the brightest wits and most vigorous intellects—will commend itself more readily to the moralist than to the humanist; in other words, to the preacher rather than to the thinker, the sophist rather than the artist. Here only does Shakespeare show that he feels the necessity of condescending to such evasion or such apology as is implied in the explanation of Falstaff's incredible credulity by a reference to 'the guiltiness of his mind' and the admission, so gratifying to all minds more moral than his own, that 'wit may be made a Jack-a-Lent, when

'tis upon ill employment.' It is the best excuse that can be made ; but can we imagine the genuine, the pristine Falstaff reduced to the proffer of such an excuse in serious good earnest ?

In the original version of this comedy there was not a note of poetry from end to end ; as it then appeared, it might be said to hold the same place on the roll of Shakespeare's plays as is occupied by *Bartholomew Fair* on the roll of Ben Jonson's. From this point of view it is curious to contrast the purely farcical masterpieces of the town-bred schoolboy and the country lad. There is a certain faint air of the fields, the river, and the park, even in the rough sketch of Shakespeare's farce—wholly prosaic as it is, and in no point suggestive of any unlikelihood in the report which represents it as the composition or rather as the improvisation of a fortnight. We know at once that he must have stroked the fallow greyhound that was outrun on 'Cotsall' ; that he must—and perhaps one or twice at least too often—have played truant (some readers, boys past or present, might wish for association's sake it could actually have been Datchet-wards) from under the shadow of good Sir Hugh's probably not over formidable though 'threatening twigs of birch,' at all risks of being 'preeches' on his return, in fulfilment of the direful menace held out to that young namesake of his over whose innocence Mrs. Quickly was so creditably vigilant. On the other hand, no student of Jonson will need to be reminded how closely and precociously familiar the big stalwart Westminster boy, Camden's favoured and grateful pupil, must have made himself with the rankest haunts and most unsavoury recesses of that ribald waterside and Smithfield life which he lived to reproduce on the stage.

with a sometimes insufferable fidelity to details from which Hogarth might have shrunk. Even his unrivalled proficiency in classic learning can hardly have been the fruit of greater or more willing diligence in school hours than he must have lavished on other than scholastic studies in the streets. The humour of his huge photographic group of divers 'humours' is undeniably and incomparably richer, broader, fuller of invention and variety, than any that Shakespeare's lighter work can show ; all the five acts of the latter comedy can hardly serve as counterpoise, in weight and wealth of comic effect, to the single scene in which Zeal-of-the-Land defines the moral and theological boundaries of action and intention which distinguish the innocent if not laudable desire to eat pig from the venial though not mortal sin of longing to eat pig in the thick of the profane Fair, which may rather be termed a foul than a fair. Taken from that point of view which looks only to force and freedom and range of humorous effect, Jonson's play is to his friend's as London is to Windsor ; but in more senses than one it is to Shakespeare's as the Thames at London Bridge is to the Thames at Eton : the atmosphere of Smithfield is not more different from the atmosphere of the playing-fields ; and some, too delicate of nose or squeamish of stomach, may prefer Cuckoo Weir to Shoreditch. But undoubtedly the phantoms of Shallow and Mrs. Quickly which put in (so to speak) a nominal reappearance in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are comparatively as poor and thin if set over against the full rich outlines of Rabbi Busy and Dame Purecraft as these again are at all points alike inferior to the real Shallow and the genuine Quickly of *King Henry IV*. It is true that Jonson's humour has sometimes less in common with

Shakespeare's than with the humour of Swift, Smollett, and Carlyle. For all his admiration and even imitation of Rabelais, Shakespeare has hardly once or twice burnt but so much as a stray pinch of fugitive incense on the altar of Cloacina ; the only Venus acknowledged and adored by those three latter humourists. If not always constant with the constancy of Milton to the service of Urania, he never turns into a dirtier byway or back alley than the beaten path trodden occasionally by most of his kind which leads them on a passing errand of no unnatural devotion to the shrine of Venus Pandemos.

When, however, we turn from the raw rough sketch to the enriched and ennobled version of the present play we find it in this its better shape more properly comparable with another and a nobler work of Jonson's—with that magnificent comedy, the first avowed and included among his collection by its author, which according to all tradition first owed its appearance and success to the critical good sense and generous good offices of Shakespeare. Neither my duly unqualified love for the greater poet nor my duly qualified regard for the less can alter my sense that their mutual relations are in this one case inverted ; that *Every Man in his Humour* is altogether a better comedy and a work of higher art than *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Kitely is to Ford almost what Arnolphe is to Sganarelle. (As according to the learned Métaphraste 'Filio non potest præferri nisi filius,' even so can no one but Molière be preferred or likened to Molière.) Without actually touching like Arnolphe on the hidden springs of tragedy, the jealous husband in Jonson's play is only kept from trenching on the higher and forbidden grounds of passion by the potent will and the consummate self-

command of the great master who called him up in perfect likeness to the life. Another or a deeper tone, another or a stronger touch, in the last two admirable scenes with his cashier and his wife, when his hot smouldering suspicion at length catches fire and breaks out in agony of anger, would have removed him altogether beyond the legitimate pale of comedy. As it is, the self-control of the artist is as thorough as his grasp and mastery of his subject are triumphant and complete.

It would seem as though on revision of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* Shakespeare had found himself unwilling or rather perhaps unable to leave a single work of his hand without one touch or breath on it of beauty or of poetry. The sole fitting element of harmonious relief or variety in such a case could of course be found only in an interlude of pure fancy ; any touch of graver or deeper emotion would simply have untuned and deranged the whole scheme of composition. A lesser poet might have been powerless to resist the temptation or suggestion of sentiment that he should give to the little loves of Anne Page and Fenton a touch of pathetic or emotional interest ; but ' opulent as Shakespeare was, and of his opulence prodigal ' (to borrow a phrase from Coleridge), he knew better than to patch with purple or embroider with seed-pearl the hem of this homespun little piece of comic drugget. The match between cloth of gold and cloth of frieze could hardly have borne any good issue in this instance. Instead therefore of following the lead of Terence's or the hint of Jonson's example, and exalting the accent of his comedy to the full-mouthing pitch of a Chremes or a Kitely, he strikes out some forty and odd lines of rather coarse and commonplace doggrel about brokers, proctors, lousy

fox-eyed serjeants, blue and red noses, and so forth, to make room for the bright light interlude of fairy-land child's-play which might not unfittingly have found place even within the moon-charmed circle of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even in that all heavenly poem there are hardly to be found lines of more sweet and radiant simplicity than here.

The refined instinct, artistic judgment, and consummate taste of Shakespeare were perhaps never so wonderfully shown as in his recast of another man's work—a man of real if rough genius for comedy—which we get in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Only the collation of scene with scene, then of speech with speech, then of line with line, will show how much may be borrowed from a stranger's material and how much may be added to it by the same stroke of a single hand. All the force and humour alike of character and situation belong to Shakespeare's eclipsed and forlorn precursor ; he has added nothing ; he has tempered and enriched everything. That the luckless author of the first sketch is like to remain a man as nameless as the deed of the witches in *Macbeth*, unless some chance or caprice of accident should suddenly flash favouring light on his now impersonal and indiscernible individuality, seems clear enough when we take into account the double and final disproof of his imaginary identity with Marlowe, which Mr. Dyce has put forward with such unanswerable certitude. He is a clumsy and coarse-fingered plagiarist from that poet, and his stolen jewels of expression look so grossly out of place in the homely setting of his usual style that they seem transmuted from real to sham. On the other hand, he is of all the Pre-Shakespeareans known to us incomparably the truest, the richest, the most powerful and original

humourist; one indeed without a second on that ground, for 'the rest are nowhere.' Now Marlowe, it need scarcely be once again reiterated, was as certainly one of the least and worst among jesters as he was one of the best and greatest among poets. There can therefore be no serious question of his partnership in a play wherein the comic achievement is excellent and the poetic attempts are execrable throughout.

The recast of it in which a greater than Berni has deigned to play the part of that poet towards a lesser than Bojardo shows tact and delicacy perhaps without a parallel in literature. No chance of improvement is missed, while nothing of value is dropped or thrown away.¹ There is just now and then a momentary return perceptible to the skipping metre and fantastic manner of the first period, which may have been unconsciously suggested by the nature of the task in hand—a task of itself implying or suggesting some new study of old models; but the main style of the play in all its weightier parts is as distinctly proper to the second period, as clear an evidence of inner and spiritual affinity (with actual tabulation of dates, were such a thing as feasible as it is impossible, I must repeat that the argument would here be—what it is now—in no wise concerned), as is the handling of character throughout; but most especially the subtle force, the impeccable and careful instinct, the masculine delicacy of touch, by which the somewhat ruffianly temperament of the original

¹ Possibly some readers may agree with my second thoughts, in thinking that one exception may here be made and some surprise be here expressed at Shakespeare's rejection of Sly's memorable query: 'When will the fool come again, Sim?' It is true that he could well afford to spare it, as what could he not well afford to spare? but I will confess that it seems to me worthy of a place among his own Sly's most admirable and notable sallies of humour.

Ferando is at once refined and invigorated through its transmutation into the hearty and humorous manliness of Petruchio's.

It is observable that those few and faint traces which we have noticed in this play of a faded archaic style trying as it were to resume a mockery of reversion are not wholly even if mainly confined to the underplot which a suggestion or surmise of Mr. Collier's long since assigned to Haughton, author of *Englishmen for my Money, or A Woman will have her Will*: a spirited, vigorous, and remarkably regular comedy of intrigue, full of rough and ready incident, bright boisterous humour, honest lively provinciality and gay high-handed Philistinism. To take no account of this attribution would be to show myself as shamelessly as shamefully deficient in that respect and gratitude which all genuine and thankful students will always be as ready to offer as all thankless and insolent sciolists can ever be to disclaim, to the venerable scholar who since I was first engaged on these notes has added yet another obligation to the many under which he had already laid all younger and lesser labourers in the same field of study, by the issue in a form fitly ennobled and enriched of his great historical work on our early stage. It might seem something of an unintended impertinence to add that such recognition of his theory no more implies a blind acceptance of it—whatever such acceptance on my part might be worth—than the expression of such gratitude and respect could reasonably be supposed to imply an equally blind confidence in the authority or the value of that version of Shakespeare's text which has been the means of exposing a name so long and so justly honoured, not merely to the natural and rational inquisition of rival students,

but to the rancorous and ribald obloquy of thankless and frontless pretenders.

Here perhaps as well as anywhere else I may find a proper place to intercalate the little word I have to say in partial redemption of my pledge to take in due time some notice at more or less length of the only two among the plays doubtfully ascribed to Shakespeare which in my eyes seem to bear any credible or conceivable traces of his touch. Of these two I must give the lesser amount of space and attention to that one which in itself is incomparably the more worthy of discussion, admiration, and regard. The reason of this lies in the very excellence which has attracted to it the notice of such competent judges and the suffrage of such eminent names as would make the task of elaborate commentary and analytic examination something more than superfluous on my part ; whereas the other has never been and will never be assigned to Shakespeare by any critical student whose verdict is worth a minute's consideration or the marketable value of a straw. Nevertheless it is on other grounds worth notice ; and such notice, to be itself of any value, must of necessity be elaborate and minute. The critical analysis of *King Edward III.* I have therefore relegated to its proper place in an appendix ; while I reserve a corner of my text, at once out of admiration for the play itself and out of reverence for the names and authority of some who have given their verdict in its behalf, for a rough and rapid word or two on *Arden of Feversham*.

It is with equally inexpressible surprise that I find Mr. Collier accepting as Shakespeare's any part of *A Warning for Fair Women*, and rejecting without compromise or hesitation the belief or theory which would assign to the youth of Shakespeare the in-

comparably nobler tragic poem in question.¹ His first ascription to Shakespeare of *A Warning for Fair Women* is couched in terms far more dubious and diffident than such as he afterwards adopts. It 'might,' he says, 'be given to Shakespeare on grounds far more plausible' (on what, except possibly those of date, I cannot imagine) 'than those applicable to *Arden of Feversham*.' He then proceeds to cite some detached lines and passages of undeniable beauty and vigour, containing equally undeniable coincidences of language, illustration, and expression with 'passages in Shakespeare's undisputed plays.' From these he passes on to indicate a 'resemblance' which 'is not merely verbal,' and to extract whole speeches which 'are Shakespearean in a much better sense'; adding in a surely too trenchant fashion, 'Here we say, *aut Shakespeare aut diabolus*.' I must confess, with all esteem for the critic and all admiration for the brief scene cited, that I cannot say, Shakespeare.

There are spirits of another sort from whom we naturally expect such assumptions and inferences as start from the vantage ground of a few separate or separable passages, and clear at a flying leap the empty space intervening which divides them from the goal of evidence as to authorship. Such a spirit was that of the late Mr. Simpson, to whose wealth

¹ *History of English Dramatic Poetry*, ed. 1879, vol. ii. pp. 437-447. In a later part of his noble and invaluable work (vol. iii. p. 188) the author quotes a passage from 'the induction to *A Warning for Fair Women*, 1599 (to which Shakespeare most assuredly contributed).' It will be seen that I do not shrink from admitting the full weight of authority which can be thrown into the scale against my own opinion. To such an assertion from the insolent organs of pretentious ignorance I should be content with the simple rejoinder that Shakespeare most assuredly did nothing whatever of the sort; but to return such an answer in the present case would be to write myself down—and that in company to which I should most emphatically object—as something very decidedly more—and worse—than an ass.

of misused learning and fertility of misapplied conjecture I have already paid all due tribute ; but who must have had beyond all other sane men—most assuredly, beyond all other fairly competent critics—the gift bestowed on him by a malignant fairy of mistaking assumption for argument and possibility for proof. He was the very Columbus of mare's nests ; to the discovery of them, though they lay far beyond the pillars of Hercules, he would apply all shifts and all resources possible to an ultra-Baconian process of unphilosophical induction. On the devoted head of Shakespeare—who is also called Shakspere and Chaxpur—he would have piled a load of rubbish, among which the crude and vigorous old tragedy under discussion shines out like a veritable diamond of the desert. His ' School of Shakspere,' though not an academy to be often of necessity perambulated by the most peripatetic student of Shakespeare, will remain as a monument of critical or uncritical industry, a storehouse of curious if not of precious relics, and a warning for other than fair women—or fair scholars—to remember where ' it is written that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil and the painter with his nets.'

To me the difference appears immeasurable between the reasons for admitting the possibility of Shakespeare's authorship in the case of *Arden of Feversham*, and the pretexts for imagining the probability of his partnership in *A Warning for Fair Women*. There is a practically infinite distinction between the evidence suggested by verbal or even more than verbal resemblance of detached line to line or selected passage to passage, and the proof supplied by the general harmony and spiritual similarity of a whole poem, on comparison of it as a whole

with the known works of the hypothetical author. This proof, at all events, we surely do not get from consideration in this light of the plea put forward in behalf of *A Warning for Fair Women*. This proof, I cannot but think, we are very much nearer getting from contemplation under the same light of the claim producible for *Arden of Feversham*.

A Warning for Fair Women is unquestionably in its way a noticeable and valuable 'piece of work,' as Sly might have defined it. It is perhaps the best example anywhere extant of a merely realistic tragedy—of realism pure and simple applied to the service of the highest of the arts. Very rarely does it rise for a very brief interval to the height of tragic or poetic style, however simple and homely. The epilogue affixed to *Arden of Feversham* asks pardon of the 'gentlemen' composing its audience for 'this naked tragedy,' on the plea that 'simple truth is gracious enough' without needless ornament or bedizement of 'glozing stuff.' Far more appropriate would such an apology have been as in this case was at least superfluous, if appended by way of epilogue to *A Warning for Fair Women*. That is indeed a naked tragedy; nine-tenths of it are in no wise beyond the reach of an able, industrious, and practised reporter, commissioned by the proprietors of the journal on whose staff he might be engaged to throw into the form of scenic dialogue his transcript of the evidence in a popular and exciting case of adultery and murder. The one figure on the stage of this author which stands out sharply defined in our recollection against a background of undistinguished shadows is the figure of the adulterer and murderer. This most discreditable of Browns has a distinct and brawny outline of his own, a gait and accent as of a

genuine and recognisable man, who might have put to some better profit his shifty spirit of enterprise, his genuine capacity of affection, his burly ingenuity and hardihood. His minor confidants and accomplices, Mrs. Drury and her Trusty Roger, are mere commonplace profiles of malefactors : but it is in the contrast between the portraits of their two criminal heroines that the vast gulf of difference between the capacities of the two poets yawns patent to the sense of all readers. Anne Sanders and Alice Arden stand as far beyond comparison apart as might a portrait by any average academician and a portrait by Watts or Millais. Once only, in the simple and noble scene cited by the over generous partiality of Mr. Collier, does the widow and murderer of Sanders rise to the tragic height of the situation and the dramatic level of the part so unfalteringly sustained from first to last by the wife and the murderer of Arden.

There is the self-same relative difference between the two subordinate groups of innocent or guilty characters. That is an excellent and effective touch of realism, where Brown comes across his victim's little boy playing truant in the street with a small schoolfellow ; but in *Arden of Feversham* the number of touches as telling and as striking as this one is practically numberless. They also show a far stronger and keener faculty of poetic if not of dramatic imagination. The casual encounter of little Sanders with the yet red-handed murderer of his father is not comparable for depth and subtlety of effect with the scene in which Arden's friend Franklin, riding with him to Raynham Down, breaks off his ' pretty tale ' of a perjured wife, overpowered by a ' fighting at his heart,' at the moment when they come close upon the ambushed assassins in Alice Arden's pay. But

the internal evidence in this case, as I have already intimated, does not hinge upon the proof or the suggestion offered by any single passage or by any number of single passages. The first and last evidence of real and demonstrable weight is the evidence of character. A good deal might be said on the score of style in favour of its attribution to a poet of the first order, writing at a time when there were but two such poets writing for the stage ; but even this is here a point of merely secondary importance. It need only be noted in passing that if the problem be reduced to a question between the authorship of Shakespeare and the authorship of Marlowe there is no need and no room for further argument. The whole style of treatment from end to end is about as like the method of Marlowe as the method of Balzac is like the method of Dumas. There could be no alternative in that case ; so that the actual alternative before us is simple enough : Either this play is the young Shakespeare's first tragic masterpiece, or there was a writer unknown to us then alive and at work for the stage who excelled him as a tragic dramatist not less—to say the very least—than he was excelled by Marlowe as a narrative and tragic poet.

If we accept, as I have been told that Goethe accepted (a point which I regret my inability to verify), the former of these alternatives—or if at least we assume it for argument's sake in passing—we may easily strengthen our position by adducing as further evidence in its favour the author's thoroughly Shakespearean fidelity to the details of the prose narrative on which his tragedy is founded. But, it may be objected, we find the same fidelity to a similar text in the case of *A Warning for Fair Women*. And here again starts up the primal and radical difference

between the two works : it starts up and will not be overlooked. Equal fidelity to the narrative text we do undoubtedly find in either case ; the same fidelity we assuredly do not find. The one is a typical example of prosaic realism, the other of poetic reality. Light from darkness or truth from falsehood is not more infallibly discernible. The fidelity in the one case is exactly, as I have already indicated, the fidelity of a reporter to his notes. The fidelity in the other case is exactly the fidelity of Shakespeare in his Roman plays to the text of Plutarch. It is a fidelity which admits—I had almost written, which requires—the fullest play of the highest imagination. No more than the most realistic of reporters will it omit or falsify any necessary or even admissible detail ; but the indefinable quality which it adds to the lowest as to the highest of these is (as Lamb says of passion) ‘the all in all in poetry.’ Turning again for illustration to one of the highest names in imaginative literature—a name sometimes most improperly and absurdly inscribed on the register of the realistic school,¹—we

¹ Not for the first and probably not for the last time I turn, with all confidence as with all reverence, for illustration and confirmation of my own words, to the exquisite critical genius of a long honoured and long lamented fellow-craftsman. The following admirable and final estimate of the more special element or peculiar quality in the intellectual force of Honoré de Balzac could only have been taken by the inevitable intuition and rendered by the subtlest eloquence of Charles Baudelaire. Nothing could more aptly and perfectly illustrate the distinction indicated in my text between unimaginative realism and imaginative reality.

‘I have many a time been astonished that to pass for an observer should be Balzac’s great popular title to fame. To me it had always seemed that it was his chief merit to be a visionary, and a passionate visionary. All his characters are gifted with the ardour of life which animated himself. All his fictions are as deeply coloured as dreams. From the highest of the aristocracy to the lowest of the mob, all the actors in his *Human Comedy* are keener after living, more active and cunning in their struggles, more staunch in endurance of misfortune, more ravenous in enjoyment, more angelic in devotion, than the comedy of the real world shows them to us. In a word,

may say that the difference on this point is not the difference between Balzac and Dumas, but the distinction between Balzac and M. Zola. Let us take by way of example the character next in importance to that of the heroine—the character of her paramour. A viler figure was never sketched by Balzac ; a viler figure was seldom drawn by Thackeray. But as with Balzac, so with the author of this play, the masterful will combining with the masterly art of the creator who fashions out of the worst kind of human clay the breathing likeness of a creature so hatefully pitiful and so pitifully hateful overcomes, absorbs, annihilates all sense of such abhorrence and repulsion as would prove the work which excited them no high or even true work of art. Even the wonderful touch of dastardly brutality and pitiful self-pity with which Mosbie at once receives and repels the condolence of his mistress on his wound—

ALICE. Sweet Mosbie, hide thine arm, it kills my heart.

MOSBIE. Ay, *Mistress Arden, this is your favour.*

every one in Balzac, down to the very scullions, has genius. Every mind is a weapon loaded to the muzzle with will. It is actually Balzac himself. And as all the beings of the outer world presented themselves to his mind's eye in strong relief and with a telling expression, he has given a convulsive action to his figures ; he has blackened their shadows and intensified their lights. Besides, his prodigious love of detail, the outcome of an immoderate ambition to see everything, to bring everything to sight, to guess everything, to make others guess everything, obliged him to set down more forcibly the principal lines, so as to preserve the perspective of the whole. He reminds me sometimes of those etchers who are never satisfied with the biting-in of their outlines, and transform into very ravines the main scratches of the plate. From this astonishing natural disposition of mind wonderful results have been produced. But this disposition is generally defined as Balzac's great fault. More properly speaking, it is exactly his great distinctive quality. But who can boast of being so happily gifted, and of being able to apply a method which may permit him to invest—and that with a sure hand—what is purely trivial with splendour and imperial purple ? Who can do this ? Now, he who does not, to speak the truth, does no great thing.'

Nor was any very great thing done by the author of *A Warning for Fair Women.*

even this does not make unendurable the scenic representation of what in actual life would be unendurable for any man to witness. Such an exhibition of currish cowardice and sullen bullying spite increases rather our wondering pity for its victim than our wondering sense of her degradation. And this is a kind of triumph which only such an artist as Shakespeare in poetry or as Balzac in prose can achieve.

Alice Arden, if she be indeed a daughter of Shakespeare's, is the eldest born of that group to which Lady Macbeth and Dionyza belong by right of weird sisterhood. The wives of the thane of Glamis and the governor of Tharsus, it need hardly be said, are both of them creations of a much later date—if not of the very latest discernible or definable stage in the art of Shakespeare. Deeply dyed as she is in blood-guiltiness, the wife of Arden is much less of a born criminal than these. To her, at once the agent and the patient of her crime, the victim and the instrument of sacrifice and blood-offering to Venus Libitina, goddess of love and death,—to her, even in the deepest pit of her deliberate wickedness, remorse is natural and redemption conceivable. Like the Phædra of Racine, and herein so nobly unlike the Phædra of Euripides, she is capable of the deepest and bitterest penitence,—incapable of dying with a hideous and homicidal falsehood on her long-polluted lips. Her latest breath is not a lie but a prayer.

Considering, then, in conclusion, the various and marvellous gifts displayed for the first time on our stage by the great poet, the great dramatist, the strong and subtle searcher of hearts, the just and merciful judge and painter of human passions, who gave this tragedy to the new-born literature of our drama; taking into account the really wonderful

skill, the absoluteness of intuition and inspiration, with which every stroke is put in that touches off character or tones down effect, even in the sketching and grouping of such minor figures as the ruffianly hireling Black Will, the passionate artist without pity or conscience,¹ and above all the 'unimitated, inimitable' study of Michael, in whom even physical fear becomes tragic, and cowardice itself no ludicrous infirmity but rather a terrible passion ; I cannot but finally take heart to say, even in the absence of all external or traditional testimony, that it seems to me not pardonable merely nor permissible, but simply logical and reasonable, to set down this poem, a young man's work on the face of it, as the possible work of no man's youthful hand but Shakespeare's.

No similar question is raised, no parallel problem stated, in the case of any one other among the plays now or ever ascribed on grounds more or less dubious to that same indubitable hand. This hand I do not recognise even in *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, full as it is to overflowing of fierce animal power, and hot as with the furious breath of some caged wild beast. Heywood, who as the most realistic and in some sense prosaic dramatist of his time has been credited (though but in a modestly tentative and suggestive fashion) with its authorship, was as incapable of writing it as Chapman of writing the Shakespearean parts of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* or Fletcher of writing

¹ I do not know or remember in the whole radiant range of Elizabethan drama more than one parallel tribute to that paid in this play by an English poet to the yet foreign art of painting, through the eloquent mouth of this enthusiastic villain of genius, whom we might regard as a more genuinely Titianic sort of Wainwright. The parallel passage is that most lovely and fervid of all imaginative panegyrics on this art, extracted by Lamb from the comedy of *Doctor Dodipoll* ; which saw the light or twilight of publication just eight years later than *Arden of Faversham*.

the scenes of Wolsey's fall and Katherine's death in *King Henry VIII*. To the only editor of Shakespeare responsible for the two earlier of the three suggestions here set aside, they may be forgiven on the score of insufficient scholarship and want of critical training ; but on what ground the third suggestion can be excused in the case of men who should have a better right than most others to speak with some show of authority on a point of higher criticism, I must confess myself utterly at a loss to imagine. In *The Yorkshire Tragedy* the submissive devotion of its miserable heroine to her maddened husband is merely doglike, —though not even, in the exquisitely true and tender phrase of our sovereign poetess, 'most passionately patient.' There is no likeness in this poor trampled figure to 'one of Shakespeare's women' : Griselda was no ideal of his. To find its parallel in the dramatic literature of the great age, we must look to lesser great men than Shakespeare. Ben Jonson, a too exclusively masculine poet, will give us a couple of companion figures for her—or one such figure at least ; for the wife of Fitzdottrel, submissive as she is even to the verge of undignified if not indecorous absurdity, is less of a human spaniel than the wife of Corvino. Another such is Robert Davenport's Abstemia, so warmly admired by Washington Irving ; another is the heroine of that singularly powerful and humorous tragi-comedy, labelled *How to Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, which in its central situation anticipates that of Leigh Hunt's beautiful *Legend of Florence* ; while Dekker has revived, in one of our sweetest and most graceful examples of dramatic romance, the original incarnation of that somewhat pitiful ideal which even in a ruder and more Russian century of painful European progress out of night and winter

could only be made credible, acceptable, or endurable, by the yet unequalled genius of Chaucer and Boccaccio.

For concentrated might and overwhelming weight of realism, this lurid little play beats *A Warning for Fair Women* fairly out of the field. It is and must always be (I had nearly said, thank heaven) unsurpassable for pure potency of horror ; and the breathless heat of the action, its raging rate of speed, leaves actually no breathing-time for disgust ; it consumes our very sense of repulsion as with fire. But such power as this, though a rare and a great gift, is not the right quality for a dramatist ; it is not the fit property of a poet. Ford and Webster, even Tourneur and Marston, who have all been more or less wrongfully though more or less plausibly attacked on the score of excess in horror, have none of them left us anything so nakedly terrible, so terribly naked as this. Passion is here not merely stripped to the skin but stripped to the bones. I cannot tell who could and I cannot guess who would have written it. ‘ ‘Tis a very excellent piece of work’ ; may we never exactly look upon its like again !

I thought it at one time far from impossible, if not very nearly probable, that the author of *Arden of Feversham* might be one with the author of the famous additional scenes to *The Spanish Tragedy*, and that either both of these ‘ pieces of work ’ or neither must be Shakespeare’s. I still adhere to Coleridge’s verdict, which indeed must be that of all judges capable of passing any sentence worthier of record than are

Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle
For girls of nine :

to the effect that those magnificent passages, well-

nigh overcharged at every point with passion and subtlety, sincerity and instinct of pathetic truth, are no less like Shakespeare's work than unlike Jonson's : though hardly perhaps more unlike the typical manner of his adult and matured style than is the general tone of *The Case is Altered*, his one surviving comedy of that earlier period in which we know from Henslowe that the stout-hearted and long-struggling young playwright went through so much theatrical hackwork and piecework in the same rough harness with other now more or less notable workmen then drudging under the manager's dull narrow sidelong eye for bare bread and bare shelter. But this unlikeness, great as it is and serious and singular, between his former and his latter style in high comedy, gives no warrant for us to believe him capable of so immeasurable a transformation in tragic style and so indescribable a decadence in tragic power as would be implied in a descent from the 'fine madness' of 'old Jeronymo' to the flat sanity and smoke-dried sobriety of *Catiline* and *Sejanus*. — I cannot but think, too, that Lamb's first hypothetical ascription of these wonderful scenes to Webster, so much the most Shakespearean in gait and port and accent of all Shakespeare's liege men-at-arms, was due to a far happier and more trustworthy instinct than led him in later years to liken them rather to 'the overflowing griefs and talking distraction of *Titus Andronicus*'.

We have wandered it may be somewhat out of the right time into a far other province of poetry than the golden land of Shakespeare's ripest harvest-fields of humour. And now, before we may enter the 'flowery square' made by the summer growth of his four greatest works in pure and perfect comedy 'beneath a broad and equal-blowing wind' of all

happiest and most fragrant imagination, we have but one field to cross, one brook to ford, that hardly can be thought to keep us out of Paradise. In the garden-plot on whose wicket is inscribed *All's Well that Ends Well*, we are hardly distant from Eden itself

About a young dove's flutter from a wood.

The ninth story of the third day of the Decameron is one of the few subjects chosen by Shakespeare—as so many were taken by Fletcher—which are less fit, we may venture to think, for dramatic than for narrative treatment. He has here again shown all possible delicacy of instinct in handling a matter which unluckily it was not possible to handle on the stage with absolute and positive delicacy of feeling or expression. Dr. Johnson—in my humble opinion, with some justice; though his verdict has been disputed on the score of undeserved austerity—‘could not reconcile his heart to Bertram’; and I, unworthy as I may be to second or support on the score of morality the finding of so great a moralist, cannot reconcile my instincts to Hclena. Parolles is even better than Bobadil, as Bobadil is even better than Bessus; and Lafeu is one of the very best old men in all the range of comic art. But the whole charm and beauty of the play, the quality which raises it to the rank of its fellows by making it loveable as well as admirable, we find only in the ‘sweet, serene, skylike’ sanctity and attraction of adorable old age, made more than ever near and dear to us in the incomparable figure of the old Countess of Roussillon. At the close of the play, Fletcher would inevitably have married her to Lafeu—or rather, possibly, to the King.

At the entrance of the heavenly quadrilateral, or under the rising dawn of the four fixed stars which

compose our Northern Cross among the constellations of dramatic romance hung high in the highest air of poetry, we may well pause for very dread of our own delight, lest unawares we break into mere babble of childish rapture and infantile thanksgiving for such light vouchsafed even to our 'settentrional vedovo sito' that even at their first dawn out of the depths

Goder pareva il ciel di lor fiammelle.

Beyond these again we see a second group arising, the supreme starry trinity of *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Cymbeline*: and beyond these the divine darkness of everlasting and all-maternal night. These seven lamps of the romantic drama have in them—if I may strain the similitude a little further yet—more of lyric light than could fitly be lent to feed the fire or the sunshine of the worlds of pure tragedy or comedy. There is more play, more vibration as it were, in the splendours of their spheres. Only in the heaven of Shakespeare's making can we pass and repass at pleasure from the sunny to the stormy lights, from the glory of *Cymbeline* to the glory of *Othello*.

In this first group of four—wholly differing on that point from the later constellation of three—there is but very seldom, not more than once or twice at most, a shooting or passing gleam of anything more lurid or less lovely than 'a light of laughing flowers.' There is but just enough of evil or even of passion admitted into their sweet spheres of life to proclaim them living: and all that does find entrance is so tempered by the radiance of the rest that we retain but softened and lightened recollections even of Shylock and Don John when we think of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado about Nothing*; we hardly feel in *As You Like It* the presence or the

existence of Oliver and Duke Frederick ; and in *Twelfth Night*, for all its name of the midwinter, we find nothing to remember that might jar with the loveliness of love and the summer light of life.

No astronomer can ever tell which if any one among these four may be to the others as a sun ; for in this special tract of heaven 'one star differeth' not 'from another star in glory.' From each and all of them, even 'while this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close [us] in,' we cannot *but* hear the harmony of a single immortal soul

Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins.

The coincidence of the divine passage in which I have for once permitted myself the freedom of altering for quotation's sake one little word, with a noble excerpt given by Hallam from the Latin prose writings of Campanella, may recall to us with a doubly appropriate sense of harmonious fitness the subtly beautiful image of Lord Tennyson ;—

Star to star vibrates light : may soul to soul
Strike thro' a finer element of her own ?

Surely, if ever she may, such a flash might we fancy to have passed from the spirit of the most glorious martyr and poet to the spirit of the most glorious poet and artist upon the face of the earth together. Even to Shakespeare any association of his name with Campanella's, as even to Campanella any association of his name with Shakespeare's, cannot but be an additional ray of honour : and how high is the claim of the divine philosopher to share with the godlike dramatist their common and crowning name of poet, all Englishmen at least may now perceive by study of Campanella's sonnets in the noble and exquisite version

of Mr. Symonds ; to whom among other kindred debts we owe no higher obligation than is due to him as the giver of these poems to the inmost heart of all among his countrymen whose hearts are worthy to hold and to hoard up such treasure.

Where nothing at once new and true can be said, it is always best to say nothing ; as it is in this case to refrain from all reiteration of rhapsody which must have been somewhat ‘ mouldy ere ’ any living man’s ‘ grandsires had nails on their toes,’ if not at that yet remoter date ‘ when King Pepin of France was a little boy ’ and ‘ Queen Guinever of Britain was a little wench.’ In *The Merchant of Venice*, at all events, there is hardly a single character from Portia to old Gobbo, a single incident from the exaction of Shylock’s bond to the computation of hairs in Launcelot’s beard and Dobbin’s tail, which has not been more plentifully beprosed than ever Rosalind was berhymed. Much wordy wind has also been wasted on comparison of Shakespeare’s Jew with Marlowe’s ; that is, of a living subject for terror and pity with a mere mouth-piece for the utterance of poetry as magnificent as any but the best of Shakespeare’s.

Nor can it well be worth any man’s while to say or to hear for the thousandth time that *As You Like It* would be one of those works which prove, as Landor said long since, the falsehood of the stale axiom that no work of man’s can be perfect, were it not for that one unlucky slip of the brush which has left so ugly a little smear in one corner of the canvas as the betrothal of Oliver to Celia ; though, with all reverence for a great name and a noble memory, I can hardly think that matters were much mended in George Sand’s adaptation of the play by the transference of her hand to Jaques. Once else-

where, or twice only at the most, is any such other sacrifice of moral beauty or spiritual harmony to the necessities and traditions of the stage discernible in all the world-wide work of Shakespeare. In the one case it is unhappily undeniable; no man's conscience, no conceivable sense of right and wrong, but must more or less feel as did Coleridge's the double violence done it in the upshot of *Measure for Measure*. Even in the much more nearly spotless work which we have next to glance at, some readers have perhaps not unreasonably found a similar objection to the final good fortune of such a pitiful fellow as Count Claudio. It will be observed that in each case the sacrifice is made to comedy. The actual or hypothetical necessity of pairing off all the couples after such a fashion as to secure a nominally happy and undeniably matrimonial ending is the theatrical idol whose tyranny exacts this holocaust of higher and better feelings than the mere liquorish desire to leave the board of fancy with a palatable morsel of cheap sugar on the tongue.

If it is proverbially impossible to determine by selection the greatest work of Shakespeare, it is easy enough to decide on the date and the name of his most perfect comic masterpiece. For absolute power of composition, for faultless balance and blameless rectitude of design, there is unquestionably no creation of his hand that will bear comparison with *Much Ado about Nothing*. The ultimate marriage of Hero and Claudio, on which I have already remarked as in itself a doubtfully desirable consummation, makes no flaw in the dramatic perfection of a piece which could not otherwise have been wound up at all. This was its one inevitable conclusion, if the action were not to come to a tragic end; and a tragic end would here have been as painfully and as grossly out of

place as is any but a tragic end to the action of *Measure for Measure*. As for Beatrice, she is as perfect a lady, though of a far different age and breeding, as Célimène or Millamant ; and a decidedly more perfect woman than could properly or perceptibly have trod the stage of Congreve or Molière. She would have disarranged all the dramatic properties and harmonies of the one great school of pure comedy. The good fierce outbreak of her high true heart in two swift words—‘ Kill Claudio,’¹—would have fluttered the dovecotes of fashionable drama to some purpose. But Alceste would have taken her to his own.

No quainter and apter example was ever given of many men’s absolute inability to see the plainest aims, to learn the simplest rudiments, to appreciate the most practical requisites of art, whether applied to theatrical action or to any other as evident as exalted aim, than the instance afforded by that criticism of time past which sagaciously remarked that ‘any less amusingly absurd’ constables than Dogberry and Verges would have filled their parts in the action of the play equally well. Our own day has doubtless brought forth critics and students of else unparalleled capacity for the task of laying wind-eggs in mare’s nests, and wasting all the warmth of their brains and tongues in the hopeful endeavour to hatch them : but so fine a specimen was never dropped yet as this of the plumed or plumeless biped who discovered that if Dogberry had not been Dogberry and Verges had not been Verges they would have been equally unsuccessful in their honest attempt to

¹ I remember to have somewhere at some time fallen in with some remark by some commentator to some such effect as this : that it would be somewhat difficult to excuse the unwomanly violence of this demand. Doubtless it would. And doubtless it would be somewhat more than difficult to extenuate the unmaidenly indelicacy of Jeanne Darc.

warn Leonato betimes of the plot against his daughter's honour. The only explanation of the mistake is this; and it is one of which the force will be intelligible only to those who are acquainted with the very singular physiology of that remarkably prolific animal known to critical science as the Shakespearean scholiast: that if Dogberry had been other than Dogberry, or if Verges had been other than Verges, the action and catastrophe of the whole play could never have taken place at all.

All true Pantagruelians will always, or at least as long as may be permitted by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, cherish with an especial regard the comedy in which Shakespeare also has shown himself as surely the loving as he would surely have been the beloved disciple of that insuppressible divine, the immortal and most reverend vicar of Meudon. Two only among the mighty men who lived and wrote and died within the century which gave birth to Shakespeare were found worthy of so great an honour at his hands as the double homage of citation and imitation: and these two, naturally and properly enough, were François Rabelais and Christopher Marlowe. We cannot but recognise on what far travels in what good company 'Feste the jester' had but lately been, on that night of 'very gracious fooling' when he was pleased to enlighten the unforgetful mind of Sir Andrew as to the history of Pigrogromitus, and of the Vapians passing the equinoctial of Queubus. At what precise degree of latitude and longitude between the blessed islands of Medamothy and Papi-mania this equinoctial may intersect the Sporades of the outer ocean, is a problem on the solution of which the energy of those many modern sons of Aguecheek who have undertaken the task of writing about and about the text and the history of Shakespeare might be expended

with an unusually reasonable hope and expectation of arriving at an exceptionally profitable end.

Even apart from their sunny identity of spirit and bright sweet brotherhood of style, the two comedies of *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* would stand forth confessed as the common offspring of the same spiritual period by force and by right of the trace or badge they proudly and professedly bear in common, as of a recent touch from the ripe and rich and radiant influence of Rabelais. No better and no fuller vindication of his happy memory could be afforded than by the evident fact that the two comedies which bear the imprint of his sign-manual are among all Shakespeare's works as signally remarkable for the cleanliness as for the richness of their humour. Here is the right royal seal of Pantagruel, clean-cut and clearly stamped, and unincrusted with any flake of dirt from the dubious finger of Panurge. In the comic parts of those plays in which the humour is rank and flagrant that exhales from the lips of Lucio, of Boult, or of Thersites, there is no trace or glimpse of Rabelais. From him Shakespeare has learnt nothing and borrowed nothing that was not wise and good and sweet and clean and pure. All the more honour, undoubtedly, to Shakespeare, that he would borrow nothing else : but assuredly, also, all the more honour to Rabelais, that he had enough of this to lend.

It is less creditable to England than honourable to France that a Frenchman should have been the first of Shakespearean students to discover and to prove that the great triad of his Roman plays is not a consecutive work of the same epoch. Until the appearance of François-Victor Hugo's incomparable translation, with its elaborate and admirable 'commentary, it seems to have been the universal and

certainly a most natural habit of English criticism to take the three as they usually appear together, in the order of historical chronology, and by tacit implication to assume that they were composed in such order. I should take some shame to myself but that I feel more of grateful pride than of natural shame in the avowal that I at all events owe the first revelation of the truth now so clear and apparent in this matter, to the son of the common lord and master of all poets born in his age—be they liege subjects as loyal as myself or as contumacious as I grieve to find one at least of my elders and betters, whenever I perceive—as too often I cannot choose but perceive—that the voice is the voice of Arnold, but the hand is the hand of Sainte-Beuve.

To the honoured and lamented son of our beloved and glorious Master, whom neither I nor any better man can ever praise and thank and glorify enough, belongs all the credit of discerning for himself and discovering for us all the truth that *Julius Cæsar* is at all points equally like the greatest works of Shakespeare's middle period and unlike the works of his last. It is in the main a play belonging to the same order as *King Henry IV.*; but it differs from our English Henriade—as remarkably unlike Voltaire's as *Zaïre* is unlike *Othello*—not more by the absence of Falstaff than by the presence of Brutus. Here at least Shakespeare has made full amends, if not to all modern democrats, yet assuredly to all historical republicans, for any possible or apparent preference of royal to popular traditions. Whatever manner of man may have been the actual Roman, our Shakespearean Brutus is undoubtedly the very noblest figure of a typical and ideal republican in all the literature of the world. ‘A democracy such as yours in America

is my abhorrence,' wrote Landor once to an impudent and foul-mouthed Yankee pseudosopher, who had intruded himself on that great man's privacy in order to have the privilege of afterwards informing the readers of a pitiful pamphlet on England that Landor had 'pestered him with Southey'; an impertinence, I may add, which Mr. Landor at once rebuked with the sharpest contempt and chastised with the haughtiest courtesy. But, the old friend and lifelong champion of Kossuth went on to say, his feelings were far different towards a republic; and if on the one point, then not less certainly on the other, we may be assured that his convictions and his prepossessions would have been shared by the author of *Coriolanus* and *Julius Cæsar*.

Having now come perforce to the inevitable verge of *Hamlet*, I hasten to declare that I can advance no pretension to compete with the claim of that 'literary man' who became immortal by dint of one dinner with a bishop, and in right of that last glass poured out for him in sign of amity by 'Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus Episcopus, necnon* the deuce knows what.' I do not propose to prove my perception of any point in the character of Hamlet 'unseized by the Germans yet.' I can only determine, as the Church Catechism was long since wont to bid me, 'to keep my hands from picking and stealing, and my tongue' not only 'from evil-speaking, lying, and slandering'—though this itself is a form of abstinence not universally or even commonly practised among the rampant rout of rival commentators—but also, now as ever throughout this study, from all conscious repetition of what others have said before me.

In *Hamlet*, as it seems to me, we set foot as it were on the bridge between the middle and the final

period of Shakespearc. That priceless waif of piratical salvage which we owe to the happy rapacity of a hungry publisher is of course more accurately definable as the first play of *Hamlet* than as the first edition of the play. And this first *Hamlet*, on the whole, belongs altogether to the middle period. The deeper complexities of the subject are merely indicated. Simple and trenchant outlines of character are yet to be supplanted by features of subtler suggestion and infinite interfusion. Hamlet himself is almost more of a satirist than a philosopher : Asper and Macilente, Felice and Malevole, the grim studies after Hamlet unconsciously or consciously taken by Jonson and Marston, may pass as wellnigh passable imitations, with an inevitable streak of caricature in them, of the first Hamlet ; they would have been at once puerile and ghastly travesties of the second. The Queen, whose finished figure is now something of a riddle, stands out simply enough in the first sketch as confidant of Horatio if not as accomplice of Hamlet. There is not more difference between the sweet quiet flow of those plain verses which open the original play within the play and the stiff sonorous tramp of their substitutes, full-charged with heavy classic artillery of Phœbus and Neptune and Tellus and Hymen, than there is between the straightforward agents of their own destiny whom we meet in the first *Hamlet* and the obliquely moving patients who veer sideways to their doom in the second.

This minor transformation of style in the inner play, made solely with the evident view of marking the distinction between its duly artificial forms of speech and the duly natural forms of speech passing between the spectators, is but one among innumerable indications which only a purblind perversity of

prepossession can overlook of the especial store set by Shakespeare himself on this favourite work, and the exceptional pains taken by him to preserve it for aftertime in such fullness of finished form as might make it worthiest of profound and perpetual study by the light of far other lamps than illuminate the stage. Of all vulgar errors the most wanton, the most wilful, and the most resolutely tenacious of life, is that belief bequeathed from the days of Pope, in which it was pardonable, to the days of Mr. Carlyle, in which it is not excusable, to the effect that Shakespeare threw off *Hamlet* as an eagle may moult a feather or a fool may break a jest ; that he dropped his work as a bird may drop an egg or a sophist a fallacy ; that he wrote 'for gain, not glory,' or that having written *Hamlet* he thought it nothing very wonderful to have written. For himself to have written, he possibly, nay probably, did not think it anything miraculous ; but that he was in the fullest degree conscious of its wonderful positive worth to all men for all time, we have the best evidence possible—his own ; and that not by mere word of mouth but by actual stroke of hand. Ben Jonson might shout aloud over his own work on a public stage, 'By God, 'tis good,' and so for all its real goodness and his real greatness make sure that both the workman and his work should be less unnaturally than unreasonably laughed at ; Shakespeare knew a better way of showing confidence in himself, but he showed not a whit less confidence. Scene by scene, line for line, stroke upon stroke and touch after touch, he went over all the old laboured ground again ; and not to ensure success in his own day and fill his pockets with contemporary pence, but merely and wholly with a purpose to make it worthy of himself

and his future students. Pence and praise enough it had evidently brought him in from the first. No more palpable proof of this can be desired than the instantaneous attacks on it, the jeers, howls, hoots and hisses of which a careful ear may catch some faint echo even yet ; the fearful and furtive yelp from beneath of the masked and writhing poeticule, the shrill reverberation all around it of plagiarism and parody. Not one single alteration in the whole play can possibly have been made with a view to stage effect or to present popularity and profit ; or we must suppose that Shakespeare, however great as a man, was naturally even greater as a fool. There is a class of mortals to whom this inference is always grateful—to whom the fond belief that every great man must needs be a great fool would seem always to afford real comfort and support : happy, in Prior's phrase, could their inverted rule prove every great fool to be a great man. Every change in the text of *Hamlet* has impaired its fitness for the stage and increased its value for the closet in exact and perfect proportion. Now, this is not a matter of opinion —of Mr. Pope's opinion or Mr. Carlyle's ; it is a matter of fact and evidence. Even in Shakespeare's time the actors threw out his additions ; they throw out these very same additions in our own. The one especial speech, if any one such especial speech there be, in which the personal genius of Shakespeare soars up to the very highest of its height and strikes down to the very deepest of its depth, is passed over by modern actors ; it was cut away by Hemings and Condell. We may almost assume it as certain that no boards have ever echoed—at least, more than once or twice—to the supreme soliloquy of Hamlet. Those words which combine

the noblest pleading ever proffered for the rights of human reason with the loftiest vindication ever uttered of those rights, no mortal ear within our knowledge has ever heard spoken on the stage. A convocation even of all priests could not have been more unhesitatingly unanimous in its rejection than seems to have been the hereditary verdict of all actors. It could hardly have been found worthier of theological than it has been found of theatrical condemnation. Yet, beyond all question, magnificent as is that monologue on suicide and doubt which has passed from a proverb into a byword, it is actually eclipsed and distanced at once on philosophic and on poetical grounds by the later soliloquy on reason and resolution.

That Shakespeare was in the genuine sense—that is, in the best and highest and widest meaning of the term—a free thinker, this otherwise practically and avowedly superfluous effusion of all inmost thought appears to me to supply full and sufficient evidence for the conviction of every candid and rational man. To that loftiest and most righteous title which any just and reasoning soul can ever deserve to claim, the greatest save one of all poetic thinkers has thus made good his right for ever.

I trust it will be taken as no breach of my past pledge to abstain from all intrusion on the sacred ground of Gigadibs and the Germans, if I venture to indicate a touch inserted by Shakespeare for no other perceptible or conceivable purpose than to obviate by anticipation the indomitable and ineradicable fallacy of criticism which would find the keynote of Hamlet's character in the quality of irresolution. I may observe at once that the misconception involved in such a reading of the riddle ought to have been evident even without this episodical stroke of illus-

tration. In any case it should be plain to any reader that the signal characteristic of Hamlet's inmost nature is by no means irresolution or hesitation or any form of weakness, but rather the strong conflux of contending forces. That during four whole acts Hamlet cannot or does not make up his mind to any direct and deliberate action against his uncle is true enough; true, also, we may say, that Hamlet had somewhat more of mind than another man to make up, and might properly want somewhat more time than might another man to do it in; but not, I venture to say in spite of Goethe, through innate inadequacy to his task and unconquerable weakness of the will; not, I venture to think in spite of Hugo, through immedicable scepticism of the spirit and irremediable propensity to nebulous intellectual refinement. One practical point in the action of the play precludes us from accepting so ready a solution of the riddle as is suggested either by the simple theory of half-heartedness or by the simple hypothesis of doubt. There is absolutely no other reason, we might say there was no other excuse, for the introduction or intrusion of an else superfluous episode into a play which was already, and which remains even after all possible excisions, one of the longest plays on record. The compulsory expedition of Hamlet to England, his discovery by the way of the plot laid against his life, his interception of the King's letter and his forgery of a substitute for it against the lives of the King's agents, the ensuing adventure of the sea-fight, with Hamlet's daring act of hot-headed personal intrepidity, his capture and subsequent release on terms giving no less patent proof of his cool-headed and ready-witted courage and resource than the attack had afforded of his physically impulsive and even im-

petuous hardihood—all this serves no purpose whatever but that of exhibiting the instant and almost unscrupulous resolution of Hamlet's character in time of practical need. But for all that he or Hamlet has got by it, Shakespeare might too evidently have spared his pains ; and for all this voice as of one crying in a wilderness, Hamlet will too surely remain to the majority of students, not less than to all actors and all editors and all critics, the standing type and embodied emblem of irresolution, half-heartedness, and doubt.

That Hamlet should seem at times to accept for himself, and even to enforce by reiteration of argument upon his conscience and his reason, some such conviction or suspicion as to his own character, tells much rather in disfavour than in favour of its truth. A man whose natural temptation was to swerve, whose inborn inclination was to shrink and skulk aside from duty and from action, would hardly be the first and last person to suspect his own weakness, the one only unbiased judge and witness of sufficiently sharp-sighted candour and accuracy to estimate aright his poverty of nature and the malformation of his mind. But the high-hearted and tender-conscienced Hamlet, with his native bias towards introspection intensified and inflamed and directed and dilated at once by one imperative pressure and oppression of unavoidable and unalterable circumstance, was assuredly and exactly the one only man to be troubled by any momentary fear that such might indeed be the solution of his riddle, and to feel or to fancy for the moment some kind of ease and relief in the sense of that very trouble. A born doubter would have doubted even of Horatio ; hardly can all positive and almost palpable evidence of underhand instigation and inspired good intentions induce Hamlet for some time to doubt even of Ophelia.

III

THE entrance to the third period of Shakespeare is like the entrance to that lost and lesser Paradise of old,

With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms.

Lear, Othello, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Antony, Timon, these are names indeed of something more than tragic purport. Only in the sunnier distance beyond, where the sunset of Shakespeare's imagination seems to melt or flow back into the sunrise, do we discern Prospero beside Miranda, Florizel by Perdita, Palamon with Arcite, the same knightly and kindly Duke Theseus as of old ; and above them all, and all others of his divine and human children, the crowning and final and ineffable figure of Imogen.

Of all Shakespeare's plays, *King Lear* is unquestionably that in which he has come nearest to the height and to the likeness of the one tragic poet on any side greater than himself whom the world in all its ages has ever seen born of time. It is by far the most Æschylean of his works ; the most elemental and primæval, the most oceanic and Titanic in conception. He deals here with no subtleties as in *Hamlet*, with no conventions as in *Othello* : there is no question of 'a divided duty' or a problem half insoluble, a matter of country and connection, of family or of race ; we look upward and downward, and in vain, into the deepest things of nature, into the highest things of providence ; to the roots of life, and to the stars ;

from the roots that no God waters to the stars which give no man light ; over a world full of death and life without resting-place or guidance.

But in one main point it differs radically from the work and the spirit of Æschylus. Its fatalism is of a darker and harder nature. To Prometheus the fetters of the lord and enemy of mankind were bitter ; upon Orestes the hand of heaven was laid too heavily to bear ; yet in the not utterly infinite or everlasting distance we see beyond them the promise of the morning on which mystery and justice shall be made one ; when righteousness and omnipotence at last shall kiss each other. But on the horizon of Shakespeare's tragic fatalism we see no such twilight of atonement, such pledge of reconciliation as this. Requital, redemption, amends, equity, explanation, pity and mercy, are words without a meaning here.

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods ;
They kill us for their sport.

Here is no need of the Eumenides, children of Night everlasting ; for here is very Night herself.

The words just cited are not casual or episodical ; they strike the keynote of the whole poem, lay the keystone of the whole arch of thought. There is no contest of conflicting forces, no judgment so much as by casting of lots : far less is there any light of heavenly harmony or of heavenly wisdom, of Apollo or Athene from above. We have heard much and often from theologians of the light of revelation : and some such thing indeed we find in Æschylus : but the darkness of revelation is here.

For in this the most terrible work of human genius it is with the very springs and sources of nature that her student has set himself to deal. The veil of the

temple of our humanity is rent in twain. Nature herself, we might say, is revealed—and revealed as unnatural. In face of such a world as this a man might be forgiven who should pray that chaos might come again. Nowhere else in Shakespeare's work or in the universe of jarring lives are the lines of character and event so broadly drawn or so sharply cut. Only the supreme self-command of this one poet could so mould and handle such types as to restrain and prevent their passing from the abnormal into the monstrous: yet even as much as this, at least in all cases but one, it surely has accomplished. In Regan alone would it be, I think, impossible to find a touch or trace of anything less vile than it was devilish. Even Goneril has her one splendid hour, her fire-flaught of hellish glory; when she treads under foot the half-hearted goodness, the wordy and windy though sincere abhorrence, which is all that the mild and impotent revolt of Albany can bring to bear against her imperious and dauntless devilhood; when she flaunts before the eyes of her 'milk-livered' and 'moral fool' the coming banners of France about the 'plumed helm' of his slayer.

On the other side, Kent is the exception which answers to Regan on this. Cordelia, the brotherless Antigone of our stage, has one passing touch of intolerance for what her sister was afterwards to brand as indiscretion and dotage in their father, which redeems her from the charge of perfection. Like Imogen, she is not too inhumanly divine for the sense of divine irritation. Godlike though they be, their very godhead is human and feminine; and only therefore credible, and only therefore adorable. Cloten and Regan, Goneril and Iachimo, have power to stir and embitter the sweetness of their blood.

But for the contrast and even the contact of antagonists as abominable as these, the gold of their spirit would be too refined, the lily of their holiness too radiant, the violet of their virtue too sweet. As it is, Shakespeare has gone down perforce among the blackest and the basest things of nature to find anything so equally exceptional in evil as properly to counterbalance and make bearable the excellence and extremity of their goodness. No otherwise could either angel have escaped the blame implied in the very attribute and epithet of blameless. But where the possible depth of human hell is so foul and unfathomable as it appears in the spirits which serve as foils to these, we may endure that in them the inner height of heaven should be no less immaculate and immeasurable.

It should be a truism wellnigh as musty as Hamlet's half cited proverb, to enlarge upon the evidence given in *King Lear* of a sympathy with the mass of social misery more wide and deep and direct and bitter and tender than Shakespeare has shown elsewhere. But as even to this day and even in respectable quarters the murmur is not quite duly extinct which would charge on Shakespeare a certain share of divine indifference to suffering, of godlike satisfaction and a less than compassionate content, it is not yet perhaps utterly superfluous to insist on the utter fallacy and falsity of their creed who whether in praise or in blame would rank him to his credit or discredit among such poets as on this side at least may be classed rather with Goethe than with Shelley and with Gautier than with Hugo. A poet of revolution he is not, as none of his country in that generation could have been : but as surely as the author of *Julius Cæsar* has approved himself in the best and highest sense of the word at

least potentially a republican, so surely has the author of *King Lear* avowed himself in the only good and rational sense of the words a spiritual if not a political democrat and socialist.

It is only, I think, in this most tragic of tragedies that the sovereign lord and incarnate god of pity and terror can be said to have struck with all his strength a chord of which the resonance could excite such angry agony and heartbreak of wrath as that of the brother kings when they smote their staffs against the ground in fierce imperious anguish of agonised and rebellious compassion, at the oracular cry of Calchas for the innocent blood of Iphigenia. The doom even of Desdemona seems as much less morally intolerable as it is more logically inevitable than the doom of Cordelia. But doubtless the fatalism of *Othello* is as much darker and harder than that of any third among the plays of Shakespeare, as it is less dark and hard than the fatalism of *King Lear*. For upon the head of the very noblest man whom even omnipotence or Shakespeare could ever call to life he has laid a burden in one sense yet heavier than the burden of Lear, insomuch as the sufferer can with somewhat less confidence of universal appeal proclaim himself a man more sinned against than sinning.

And yet, if ever man after Lear might lift up his voice in that protest, it would assuredly be none other than Othello. He is in all the prosperous days of his labour and his triumph so utterly and wholly nobler than the self-centred and wayward king, that the capture of his soul and body in the unimaginable snare of Iago seems a yet blinder and more unrighteous blow.

Struck by the envious wrath of man or God

than ever fell on the old white head of that child-changed father. But at least he is destroyed by the stroke of a mightier hand than theirs who struck down Lear. As surely as Othello is the noblest man of man's making, Iago is the most perfect evil-doer, the most potent demi-devil. It is of course the merest commonplace to say as much, and would be no less a waste of speech to add the half comfortable reflection that it is in any case no shame to fall by such a hand. But this subtlest and strangest work of Shakespeare's admits and requires some closer than common scrutiny. Coleridge has admirably described the first great soliloquy which opens to us the pit of hell within as 'the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity.' But subtle and profound and just as is this definitive appreciation, there is more in the matter yet than even this. It is not only that Iago, so to speak, half tries to make himself half believe that Othello has wronged him, and that the thought of it gnaws him inly like a poisonous mineral: though this also be true, it is not half the truth—nor half that half again. Malignant as he is, the very subtlest and strongest component of his complex nature is not even malignity. It is the instinct of what Mr. Carlyle would call an inarticulate poet. In his immortal study on the affair of the diamond necklace, the most profound and potent humourist of his country in his century has unwittingly touched on the mainspring of Iago's character—'the very pulse of the machine.' He describes his Circe de la Mothe-Valois as a practical dramatic poet or playwright at least in lieu of play-writer: while indicating how and wherefore, with all her constructive skill and rhythmic art in action, such genius as hers so differs from the genius of Shakespeare that she undeniably could not have written a

Hamlet. Neither could Iago have written an *Othello*. (From this theorem, by the way, a reasoner or a casuist benighted enough to prefer articulate poets to inarticulate, Shakespeare to Cromwell, a fair Vittoria Colonna to a 'foul Circe-Megæra,' and even such a strategist as Homer to such a strategist as Frederic-William, would not illogically draw such conclusions or infer such corollaries as might result in opinions hardly consonant with the Teutonic-Titanic evangel of the preacher who supplied him with his thesis.) 'But what he can do, that he will': and if it be better to make a tragedy than to write one, to act a poem than to sing it, we must allow to Iago a station in the hierarchy of poets very far in advance of his creator's. None of the great inarticulate may more justly claim place and precedence. With all his poetic gift, he has no poetic weakness. Almost any creator but this would have given him some grain of spite or some spark of lust after Desdemona. To Shakespeare's Iago she is no more than is a rhyme to another and articulate poet.¹ His stanza must at any rate and at all costs be polished: to borrow the metaphor used by Mr. Carlyle in apologetic illustration of a royal hero's peculiar system of levying recruits for his colossal brigade. He has within him a sense or conscience of power incomparable: and this power shall not be left, in Hamlet's phrase, 'to fust in him unused.' A genuine and thorough capacity for human

¹ What would at least be partly lust in another man is all but purely hatred in Iago.

Now I do love her too :
Not out of absolute lust, (though, peradventure,
I stand accountant for as great a sin)
But partly led to diet my revenge.

For 'partly' read 'wholly,' and for 'peradventure' read 'assuredly,' and the incarnate father of lies, made manifest in the flesh, here speaks all but all the truth for once, to himself alone.

lust or hate would diminish and degrade the supremacy of his evil. He is almost as far above or beyond vice as he is beneath or beyond virtue. And this it is that makes him impregnable and invulnerable. When once he has said it, we know as well as he that thenceforth he never will speak word. We could smile almost as we can see him to have smiled at Gratiano's most ignorant and empty threat, being well assured that torments will in no wise ope his lips : that as surely and as truthfully as ever did the tortured philosopher before him, he might have told his tormentors that they did but bruise the coating, batter the crust, or break the shell of Iago. Could we imagine a far other lost spirit than Farinata degli Uberti's endowed with Farinata's might of will, and transferred from the sepulchres of fire to the dykes of Malebolge, we might conceive something of Iago's attitude in hell—of his unalterable and indomitable posture for all eternity. As though it were possible and necessary that in some one point the extremities of all conceivable good and of all imaginable evil should meet and mix together in a new 'marriage of heaven and hell,' the action in passion of the most devilish among all the human damned could hardly be other than that of the most godlike among all divine saviours—the figure of Iago than a reflection by hell-fire of the figure of Prometheus.

Between Iago and Othello the position of Desdemona is precisely that defined with such quaint sublimity of fancy in the old English byword—'between the devil and the deep sea.' Deep and pure and strong and adorable always and terrible and pitiless on occasion as the sea is the great soul of the glorious hero to whom she has given herself ; and what likeness of man's enemy from Satan down

to Mephistopheles could be matched for danger and for dread against the good bluff soldierly trustworthy figure of honest Iago? The rough license of his tongue at once takes warrant from his good soldiership and again gives warrant for his honesty: so that in a double sense it does him yeoman's service, and that twice told. It is pitifully ludicrous to see him staged to the show like a member—and a very inefficient member—of the secret police. But it would seem impossible for actors to understand that he is not a would-be detective, an aspirant for the honours of a Vidocq, a candidate for the laurels of a Vautrin: that he is no less than Lepidus, or than Antony's horse, 'a tried and valiant soldier.' It is perhaps natural that the two deepest and subtlest of all Shakespeare's intellectual studies in good and evil should be the two most painfully misused and misunderstood alike by his commentators and his fellows of the stage: it is certainly undeniable that no third figure of his creation has ever been on both sides as persistently misconceived and misrepresented with such desperate pertinacity as Hamlet and Iago.

And it is only when Iago is justly appreciated that we can justly appreciate either Othello or Desdemona. This again should surely be no more than the truism that it sounds; but practically it would seem to be no less than an adventurous and audacious paradox. Remove or deform or diminish or modify the dominant features of the destroyer, and we have but the eternal and vulgar figures of jealousy and innocence, newly vamped and veneered and padded and patched up for the stalest purposes of puppetry. As it is, when Coleridge asks 'which do we pity the most, Noble as are the 'most blessed conditions' of 'the

gentle Desdemona,' he is yet the nobler of the two; and has suffered more in one single pang than she could suffer in life or in death.

But if *Othello* be the most pathetic, *King Lear* the most terrible, *Hamlet* the subtlest and deepest work of Shakespeare, the highest in abrupt and steep simplicity of epic tragedy is *Macbeth*. There needs no ghost come from the grave, any reader may too probably remark, to tell us this. But in the present generation such novelties have been unearthed regarding Shakespeare that the reassertion of an old truth may seem to have upon it some glittering reflection from the brazen brightness of a brand-new lie. Have not certain wise men of the east of England—Cantabrigian Magi, led by the star of their goddess Mathesis ('mad Mathesis,' as a daring poet was once ill-advised enough to dub her doubtful deity in defiance of scansion rather than of truth)—have they not detected in the very heart of this tragedy the ' paddling palms and pinching fingers ' of Thomas Middleton?

To the simpler eyes of less learned Thebans than these—Thebes, by the way, was Dryden's irreverent name for Cambridge, the nursing mother of 'his green unknowing youth,' when that 'renegade' was recreant enough to compliment Oxford at her expense as the chosen Athens of 'his riper age'—the likelihood is only too evident that the sole text we possess of *Macbeth* has not been interpolated but mutilated. In their version of *Othello*, remarkably enough, the 'player-editors,' contrary to their wont, have added to the treasure-house of their text one of the most precious jewels that ever the prodigal afterthought of a great poet bestowed upon the rapture of his readers. Some of these, by way of thanksgiving, have complained with a touch of petulance that it

was out of place and superfluous in the setting : nay, that it was incongruous with all the circumstances—out of tone and out of harmony and out of keeping with character and tune and time. In other lips indeed than Othello's, at the crowning minute of culminating agony, the rush of imaginative reminiscence which brings back upon his eyes and ears the lightning foam and tideless thunder of the Pontic sea might seem a thing less natural than sublime. But Othello has the passion of a poet closed in as it were and shut up behind the passion of a hero. For all his practical readiness of martial eye and ruling hand in action, he is also in his season 'of imagination all compact.' Therefore it is that in the face and teeth of all devils akin to Iago that hell could send forth to hiss at her election, we feel and recognise the spotless exaltation, the sublime and sunbright purity, of Desdemona's inevitable and invulnerable love. When once we likewise have seen Othello's visage in his mind, we see too how much more of greatness is in this mind than in another hero's. For such an one, even a boy may well think how thankfully and joyfully he would lay down his life. Other friends we have of Shakespeare's giving whom we love deeply and well, if hardly with such love as could weep for him all the tears of the body and all the blood of the heart : but there is none we love like Othello.

I must part from his presence again for a season, and return to my topic in the text of *Macbeth*. That it is piteously rent and ragged and clipped and garbled in some of its earlier scenes, the rough construction and the poltfoot metre, lame sense and limping verse, each maimed and mangled subject of players' and printers' most treasonable tyranny contending as it were to seem harsher than the other, combine in this

contention to bear indisputable and intolerable witness. Only where the witches are, and one more potent and more terrible than all witches and all devils at their beck, can we be sure that such traitors have not robbed us of one touch from Shakespeare's hand. The second scene of the play at least bears marks of such handling as the brutal Shakespearean Hector's of the 'mangled Myrmidons'; it is too visibly 'noseless, handless, hacked and chipped' as it comes to us, crying on Hemings and Condell. And it is in this unlucky scene that unkindly criticism has not unsuccessfully sought for the gravest faults of language and manner to be found in Shakespeare. For certainly it cannot be cleared from the charge of a style stiffened and swollen with clumsy braid and crabbed bombast. But against the weird sisters, and her who sits above them and apart, more awful than Hecate's very self, no mangling hand has been stretched forth; no blight of mistranslation by perversion has fallen upon the words which interpret and expound the hidden things of their evil will.

To one tragedy as to one comedy of Shakespeare's, the casual or the natural union of especial popularity with especial simplicity in selection and in treatment of character makes it as superfluous as it would be difficult to attempt any application of analytical criticism. There is nothing in them of a nature so compound or so complex as to call for solution or resolution into its primal elements. Here there is some genuine ground for the generally baseless and delusive opinion of self-complacent sciolism that he who runs may read Shakespeare. These two plays it is hardly worth while to point out by name: all probable readers will know them at once for *Macbeth* and *As You Like It*. There can hardly be a single

point of incident or of character on which the youngest reader will not find himself at one with the oldest, the dullest with the brightest among the scholars of Shakespeare. It would be an equal waste of working hours or of playtime if any of these should devote any part of either a whole-schoolday or a holiday to remark or to rhapsody on the character of Macbeth or of Orlando, of Rosalind or of Lady Macbeth. He that runs, let him read : and he that has ears, let him hear.

I cannot but think that enough at least of time has been spent if not wasted by able and even by eminent men on examination of *Coriolanus* with regard to its political aspect or bearing upon social questions. It is from first to last, for all its turmoil of battle and clamour of contentious factions, rather a private and domestic than a public or historical tragedy. As in *Julius Cæsar* the family had been so wholly subordinated to the state, and all personal interests so utterly dominated by the preponderance of national duties, that even the sweet and sublime figure of Portia passing in her 'awful loveliness' was but as a profile half caught in the background of an episode, so here on the contrary the whole force of the final impression is not that of a conflict between patrician and plebeian, but solely that of a match of passions played out for life and death between a mother and a son. The partisans of oligarchic or democratic systems may wrangle at their will over the supposed evidences of Shakespeare's prejudice against this creed and prepossession in favour of that : a third bystander may rejoice in the proof thus established of his impartial indifference towards either : it is all nothing to the real point in hand. The subject of the whole play is not the exile's revolt, the rebel's repentance, or

the traitor's reward, but above all it is the son's tragedy. The inscription on the plinth of this tragic statue is simply to Volumnia Victrix.

A loftier or a more perfect piece of man's work was never done in all the world than this tragedy of *Coriolanus*: the one fit and crowning epithet for its companion or successor is that bestowed by Coleridge — 'the most wonderful.' It would seem a sign or birthmark of only the greatest among poets that they should be sure to rise instantly for awhile above the very highest of their native height at the touch of a thought of Cleopatra. So was it, as we all know, with William Shakespeare: so is it, as we all see, with Victor Hugo. As we feel in the marvellous and matchless verses of *Zim-Zizimi* all the splendour and fragrance and miracle of her mere bodily presence, so from her first imperial dawn on the stage of Shakespeare to the setting of that eastern star behind a pall of undissolving cloud we feel the charm and the terror and the mystery of her absolute and royal soul. Byron wrote once to Moore, with how much truth or sincerity those may guess who would care to know, that his friend's first 'confounded book' of thin prurient jingle ('we call it a mellisonant tingle-tangle,' as Randolph's mock Oberon says of a stolen sheep-bell) had been the first cause of all his erratic or erotic frailties: it is not impossible that spirits of another sort may remember that to their own innocent infantine perceptions the first obscure electric revelation of what Blake calls 'the Eternal Female' was given through a blind wondering thrill of childish rapture by a lightning on the baby dawn of their senses and their soul from the sunrise of Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

Never has he given such proof of his incomparable

instinct for abstinence from the wrong thing as well as achievement of the right. He has utterly rejected and disdained all occasion of setting her off by means of any lesser foil than all the glory of the world with all its empires. And we need not Antony's example to show us that these are less than straws in the balance.

*Entre elle et l'univers qui s'offraient à la fois
Il hésita, lâchant le monde dans son choix.*

Even as that Roman grasp relaxed and let fall the world, so has Shakespeare's self let go for awhile his greater world of imagination, with all its all but infinite variety of life and thought and action, for love of that more infinite variety which custom could not stale. Himself a second and a yet more fortunate Antony, he has once more laid a world, and a world more wonderful than ever, at her feet. He has put aside for her sake all other forms and figures of womanhood ; he, father or creator of Rosalind, of Cordelia, of Desdemona, and of Imogen, he too, like the sun-god and sender of all song, has anchored his eyes on her whom 'Phœbus' amorous pinches 'could not leave 'black,' nor 'wrinkled deep in time' ; on that incarnate and imperishable 'spirit of sense,' to whom at the very last

*The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
That hurts, and is desired.*

To him, as to the dying husband of Octavia, this creature of his own hand might have boasted herself that the loveliest and purest among all her sisters of his begetting,

*with her modest eyes
And still conclusion, shall acquire no honour,
Demurring upon me.*

To sum up, Shakespeare has elsewhere given us in ideal incarnation the perfect mother, the perfect wife, the perfect daughter, the perfect mistress, or the perfect maiden : here only once for all he has given us the perfect and the everlasting woman.

And what a world of great men and great things, 'high actions and high passions,' is this that he has spread under her for a footcloth or hung behind her for a curtain ! The descendant of that other his ancestral Alcides, late offshoot of the god whom he loved and who so long was loth to leave him, is here as in history the visible one man revealed who could grapple for a second with very Rome and seem to throw it, more lightly than he could cope with Cleopatra. And not the Roman Landor himself could see or make us see more clearly than has his fellow provincial of Warwickshire that first imperial nephew of her great first paramour, who was to his actual uncle even such a foil and counterfeit and perverse and prosperous parody as the son of Hortense Beauharnais of Saint-Leu to the son of Letizia Buonaparte of Ajaccio. For Shakespeare too, like Landor, had watched his 'sweet Octavius' smilingly and frowningly 'draw under nose the knuckle of forefinger' as he looked out upon the trail of innocent blood after the bright receding figure of his brave young kinsman. The fair-faced false 'present God' of his poetic parasites, the smooth triumphant patron and preserver with the heart of ice and iron, smiles before us to the very life. It is of no account now to remember that

he at Philippi kept
His sword even like a dancer :

for the sword of Antony that struck for him is in the renegade hand of Dercetas.

I have said nothing of Enobarbus or of Eros, the fugitive once ruined by his flight and again redeemed by the death-agony of his dark and doomed repentance, or the freedman transfigured by a death more fair than freedom through the glory of the greatness of his faith : for who can speak of all things or of half that are in Shakespeare ? And who can speak worthily of any ?

I am come now to that strange part of a task too high for me, where I must needs speak not only (as may indeed well be) unworthily, but also (as may well seem) unlovingly, of some certain portions in the mature and authentic work of Shakespeare. ‘ Though it be honest, it is never good ’ to do so . yet here I cannot choose but speak plainly after my own poor conscience, and risk all chances of chastisement as fearful as any once threatened for her too faithful messenger by the heart-stricken wrath of Cleopatra.

In the greater part of this third period, taking a swift and general view of it for contrast or comparison of qualities with the second, we constantly find beauty and melody transfigured into harmony and sublimity ; an exchange unquestionably for the better : but in certain stages, or only perhaps in a single stage of it, we frequently find humour and reality supplanted by realism and obscenity ; an exchange undeniably for the worse. The note of his earliest comic style was often a boyish or a birdlike wantonness, very capable of such liberties and levities as those of Lesbia’s sparrow with the lip or bosom of his mistress ; as notably in the parts of Boyet and Mercutio : and indeed there is a bright vein of mere wordy wilfulness running throughout the golden youth of the two plays which connects *Love’s Labour’s Lost* with *Romeo and Juliet*.

as by a thread of floss silk not always 'most excellently ravelled,' nor often unspotted or unentangled. In the second period this gaiety was replaced by the utmost frankness and fullness of humour, as a boy's merry madness by the witty wisdom of a man : but now for a time it would seem as if the good comic qualities of either period were displaced and ousted by mere coarseness and crudity like that of a hard harsh photograph. This ultra-Circean transformation of spirit and brutification of speech we do not find in the lighter interludes of great and perfect tragedy : for the porter in *Macbeth* makes hardly an exception worth naming. It is when we come upon the singular little group of two or three plays not accurately definable at all but roughly describable as tragi-comedies, or more properly in two cases at least as tragedies docked of their natural end, curtailed of the due catastrophe—it is then that we find for the swift sad bright lightnings of laughter from the lips of the sweet and bitter fool whose timeless disappearance from the stage of *King Lear* seems for once a sure sign of inexplicable weariness or forgetfulness on Shakespeare's part, so nauseous and so sorry a substitute as the fetid fun and rancid ribaldry of Pandarus and Thersites. I must have leave to say that the coincidence of these two in the scheme of a single play is a thing hardly bearable by men who object to too strong a savour of those too truly 'Eternal Cesspools' over which the first of living humourists holds as it were for ever an everlasting nose—or rather, in one sense, does not hold but expand it for the fuller inhalation of their too congenial fumes with an apparent relish which will always seem the most deplorable to those who the most gratefully and reasonably admire that high heroic genius, for love of which the wiser sort of

men must finally forgive all the noisy aberrations of his misanthropy and philo-bulgary, anti-Gallican and Russolatrous insanities of perverse and morbid eloquence.

The three detached or misclassified plays of Shakespeare in which alone a reverent and reasonable critic might perhaps find something rationally and really exceptionable have also this far other quality in common, that in them as in his topmost tragedies of the same period either the exaltation of his eloquence touches the very highest point of expressible poetry, or his power of speculation alternately sounds the gulfs and scales the summits of all imaginable thought. In all three of them the power of passionate and imaginative eloquence is not only equal in spirit or essence but identical in figure or in form: in those two of them which deal almost as much with speculative intelligence as with poetic action and passion, the tones and methods, types and objects of thought, are also not equal only but identical. An all but absolute brotherhood in thought and style and tone and feeling what in the lamentable default of as apt a phrase in English I must call by its proper designation in French the *tragédie manquée* of *Measure for Measure*. In the simply romantic fragment of the Shakespearean *Pericles*, where there was no call and no place for the poetry of speculative or philosophic intelligence, there is the same positive and unmistakable identity of imaginative and passionate style.

I cannot but conjecture that the habitual students of Shakespeare's printed plays must have felt startled as by something of a shock when the same year exposed for the expenditure of their sixpences two reasonably correct editions of a play unknown to the

boards in the likeness of *Troilus and Cressida*, side by side or cheek by jowl with a most unreasonably and unconscionably incorrect issue of a much older stage favourite, now newly beautified and fortified, in *Pericles Prince of Tyre*. Hitherto, ever since the appearance of his first poem, and its instant acceptance by all classes from courtiers to courtesans under a somewhat dubious and two-headed form of popular success—‘vrai succès de scandale s'il en fut’—even the potent influence and unequivocal example of Rabelais had never once even in passing or in seeming affected or infected the progressive and triumphal genius of Shakespeare with a taint or touch of anything offensive to healthier and cleaner organs of perception than such as may belong to a genuine or a pretending Puritan. But on taking in his hand that one of these two new dramatic pamphlets which might first attract him either by its double novelty as a never acted play or by a title of yet more poetic and romantic associations than its fellow's, such a purchaser as I have supposed, with his mind full of the sweet rich fresh humour which he would feel a right to expect from Shakespeare, could hardly have undergone less than a qualm or a pang of strong disrelish and distaste on finding one of the two leading comic figures of the play break in upon it at his entrance not even with ‘a fool-born jest,’ but with full-mouthed and foul-mouthed effusion of such rank and rancorous personalities as might properly pollute the lips even of some emulous descendant or antiquarian reincarnation of Thersites, on application or even apprehension of a whip cracked in passing over the assembled heads of a pseudocritical and mock-historic society. In either case we moderns at least might haply desire the intervention of a beadle's hand as heavy and a sceptral

cudgel as knotty as ever the son of Laertes applied to the shoulders of the first of the type or the tribe of Thersites. For this brutal and brutish buffoon—I am speaking of Shakespeare's Thersites—has no touch of humour in all his currish composition: Shakespeare had none as nature has none to spare for such dirty dogs as those of his kind or generation. There is not even what Coleridge with such exquisite happiness defined as being the quintessential property of Swift—‘*anima Rabelæsii habitans in sicco*—the soul of Rabelais dwelling in a dry place.’ It is the fallen soul of Swift himself at its lowest, dwelling in a place yet drier: the familiar spirit or less than Socratic daemon of the Dean informing the genius of Shakespeare. And thus for awhile infected and possessed, the divine genius had not power to re-inform and re-create the dæmonic spirit by virtue of its own clear essence. This wonderful play, one of the most admirable among all the works of Shakespeare's immeasurable and unfathomable intelligence, as it must always hold its natural high place among the most admired, will always in all probability be also, and as naturally, the least beloved of all. It would be as easy and as profitable a problem to solve the Rabelaisian riddle of the bombinating chimæra with its potential or hypothetical faculty of deriving sustenance from a course of diet on second intentions, as to read the riddle of Shakespeare's design in the procreation of this yet more mysterious and magnificent monster of a play. That on its production in print it was formally announced as ‘a new play never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar,’ we know; must we infer or may we suppose that therefore it was not originally written for the stage? Not all plays were which even at that date

appeared in print : yet it would seem something more than strange that one such play, written simply for the study, should have been the extra-professional work of Shakespeare : and yet again it would seem stranger that he should have designed this prodigious nondescript or portent of supreme genius for the public stage : and strangest of all, if so, that he should have so designed it in vain. Perhaps after all a better than any German or Germanising commentary on the subject would be the simple and summary ejaculation of Celia—‘ O wonderful, wonderful, and most wonderful wonderful, and yet again wonderful, and after that out of all whooping ! ’ The perplexities of the whole matter seem literally to crowd and thicken upon us at every step. What ailed the man or any man to write such a manner of dramatic poem at all ? and having written, to keep it beside him or let it out of his hands into stranger and more slippery keeping, unacted and unprinted ? A German will rush in with an answer where an Englishman (*non angelus sed Anglus*) will naturally fear to tread.

Alike in its most palpable perplexities and in its most patent splendours, this political and philosophic and poetic problem, this hybrid and hundred-faced and hydra-headed prodigy, at once defies and derides all definitive comment. This however we may surely and confidently say of it, that of all Shakespeare’s offspring it is the one whose best things lose least by extraction and separation from their context. That some cynic had lately bitten him by the brain—and possibly a cynic himself in a nearly rabid stage of anthropophobia—we might conclude as reasonably from consideration of the whole as from examination of the parts more especially and virulently affected : yet how much is here also of hyper-Platonic subtlety

and sublimity, of golden and Hyblæan eloquence above the reach and beyond the snap of any cynic's tooth ! Shakespeare, as under the guidance at once for good and for evil of his alternately Socratic and Swiftian familiar, has set himself as if preposely and on purpose to brutalise the type of Achilles and spiritualise the type of Ulysses. The former is an enterprise never to be utterly forgiven by any one who ever loved from the very birth of his boyhood the very name of the son of the sea-goddess : in the glorious words of Mr. Browning's young first-born poem,

Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,
And bound [his] forehead with Proserpine's hair.

It is true, if that be any little compensation, that Hector and Andromache fare here hardly better than he : while of the momentary presentation of Helen on the dirtier boards of a stage more miry than the tub of Diogenes I would not if I could and I must not though I would say so much as one single proper word. The hysterics of the eponymous hero and the harlotries of the eponymous heroine remove both alike beyond the outer pale of all rational and manly sympathy ; though Shakespeare's self may never have exceeded or equalled for subtle and accurate and bitter fidelity the study here given of an utterly light woman, shallow and loose and dissolute in the most literal sense, rather than perverse or unkindly or unclean ; and though Keats alone in his most perfect mood of lyric passion and burning vision as full of fragrance as of flame could have matched and all but overmatched those passages in which the rapture of Troilus makes pale and humble by comparison the keenest raptures of Romeo.

The relative disfavour in which the play of *Measure*

for Measure has doubtless been at all times generally held is not in my opinion simply explicable on the theory which of late years has been so powerfully and plausibly advanced and advocated on the highest poetic or judicial authority in France or in the world, that in the land of many-coloured cant and many-coated hypocrisy the type of Angelo is something too much a prototype or an autotype of the huge national vice of England. This comment is in itself as surely just and true as it is incisive and direct : but it will not cover by any manner of means the whole question. The strong and radical objection distinctly brought forward against this play, and strenuously supported by the wisest and the warmest devotee among all the worshippers of Shakespeare, is not exactly this, that the Puritan Angelo is exposed : it is that the Puritan Angelo is unpunished. In the very words of Coleridge, it is that by his pardon and his marriage 'the strong indignant claim of justice' is 'baffled.' The expression is absolutely correct and apt : justice is not merely evaded or ignored or even defied : she is both in the older and the newer sense of the word directly and deliberately baffled ; buffeted, outraged, insulted, struck in the face. We are left hungry and thirsty after having been made to thirst and hunger for some wholesome single grain at least of righteous and too long retarded retribution : we are tricked out of our dole, defeated of our due, lured and led on to look for some equitable and satisfying upshot, defrauded and derided and sent empty away.

That this play is in its very inmost essence a tragedy, and that no sleight of hand or force of hand could give it even a tolerable show of coherence or consistency when clipped and docked of its proper and rightful end, the mere tone of style prevalent throughout all

its better parts to the absolute exclusion of any other would of itself most amply suffice to show. Almost all that is here worthy of Shakespeare at any time is worthy of Shakespeare at his highest : and of this every touch, every line, every incident, every syllable, belongs to pure and simple tragedy. The evasion of a tragic end by the invention and intromission of Mariana has deserved and received high praise for its ingenuity : but ingenious evasion of a natural and proper end is usually the distinctive quality which denotes a workman of a very much lower school than the school of Shakespeare. In short and in fact, the whole elaborate machinery by which the complete and completely unsatisfactory result of the whole plot is attained is so thoroughly worthy of such a contriver as 'the old fantastical duke of dark corners', as to be in a moral sense, if I dare say what I think, very far from thoroughly worthy of the wisest and mightiest mind that ever was informed with the spirit or genius of creative poetry.

I have one more note to add in passing which touches simply on a musical point in lyric verse ; and from which I would therefore give any biped who believes that ears 'should be long to measure Shakespeare' all timely warning to avert the length of his own. A very singular question, and one to me unaccountable except by a supposition which on charitable grounds I should be loth to entertain for a moment—namely, that such ears are commoner than I would fain believe on heads externally or ostensibly human,—has been raised with regard to the first immortal song of Mariana in the moated grange. This question is whether the second verse appended by Fletcher to that divine Shakespearean fragment may not haply have been written by the author of the first. The

visible and audible evidence that it cannot be of a kind which must at once leap into sight of all human eyes and conviction of all human ears. The metre of Shakespeare's verse, as written by Shakespeare, is not the metre of Fletcher's. It can only seem the same to those who hear by finger and not by ear : a class now at all events but too evidently numerous enough to refute Sir Hugh's antiquated objection to the once apparently tautologous phrase of Pistol.¹

It is of course inexplicable, but it is equally of course undeniable, that the mention of Shakespeare's *Pericles* would seem immediately and invariably to recall to a virtuous critical public of nice and nasty mind the prose portions of the fourth act, the whole of the prose portions of the fourth act, and nothing

¹ I add the proof in a footnote, so as to take up no more than a small necessary space of my text with the establishment of a fact which yet can seem insignificant to no mortal who has a human ear for lyric song. Shakespeare's verse, as all the wide world knows, ends thus :

But my kisses bring again,
bring again,
Seals of love, but sealed in vain,
sealed in vain.

The echo has been dropped by Fletcher, who has thus achieved the remarkable musical feat of turning a nightingale's note into a sparrow's. The mutilation of Philomela by the hands of Tereus was a jest compared to the mutilation of Shakespeare by the hands of Fletcher : who thereby reduced the close of the first verse into agreement if not into accordance with the close of his own. This appended verse, as all the world does not and need not know, ends thus :

But first set my poor heart free,
Bound in those icy chains by thee.

Even an earless owner of fingers enough to count on may by their help convince himself of the difference in metre here. But not only does the last line, with unsolicited and literally superfluous liberality, offer us a syllable over measure ; the words are such as absolutely to defy antiphonal repetition or reverberation of the three last in either line. Let us therefore, like good scriptural scholars, according equally to the letter and the spirit of the text, render unto Fletcher the things which be Fletcher's, and unto Shakespeare the things which be Shakespeare's.

but the prose portions of the fourth act. To readers and writers of books who readily admit their ineligibility as members of a Society for the Suppression of Shakespeare or Rabelais, of Homer or the Bible, it will seem that the third and fifth acts of this ill-fated and ill-famed play, and with them the poetical parts of the fourth act, are composed of metal incomparably more attractive. But the virtuous critic, after the alleged nature of the vulturine kind, would appear to have eyes and ears and nose for nothing else. It is true that somewhat more of humour, touched once and again with subtler hints of deeper truth, is woven into the too realistic weft of these too lifelike scenes than into any of the corresponding parts in *Measure for Measure* or in *Troilus and Cressida*: true also that in the hands of imitators, in hands so much weaker than Shakespeare's as were Heywood's or Davenport's (who transplanted this unlovely episode from *Pericles* into a play of his own), these very scenes or such as they reappear unredeemed by any such relief in all the rank and rampant ugliness of their raw repulsive realism: true, again, that Fletcher has once equalled them in audacity, while stripping off the nakedness of his subject the last ragged and rude pretence at a moral purpose, and investing it instead with his very brightest robe of gay parti-coloured humour: but after all it remains equally true that to senses less susceptible of attraction by carrion than belong to the vultures of critical and professional virtue they must always remain as they have always been, something very considerably more than unattractive. I at least for one must confess myself insufficiently virtuous to have ever at any time for any moment felt towards them the very slightest touch of any feeling more attractive than repulsion. And herewith I hasten to

wash my hands of the only unattractive matter in the only three of Shakespeare's plays which offer any such matter to the perceptions of any healthy-minded and reasonable human creature.

But what now shall I say that may not be too pitifully unworthy of the glories and the beauties, the unsurpassable pathos and sublimity inwoven with the imperial texture of this very play ? the blood-red Tyrian purple of tragic maternal jealousy, which might seem to array it in a worthy attire of its Tyrian name ; the flower-soft loveliness of maiden lamentation over the flower-strewn seaside grave of Marina's old sea-tossed nurse, where I am unvirtuous enough (as virtue goes among moralists) to feel more at home and better at ease than in the atmosphere of her later lodging in Mitylene ? What, above all, shall be said of that storm above all storms ever raised in poetry, which ushered into a world of such wonders and strange chances the daughter of the wave-worn and world-wandering prince of Tyre ? Nothing but this, perhaps, that it stands—or rather let me say that it blows and sounds and shines and rings and thunders and lightens as far ahead of all others as the burlesque sea-storm of Rabelais beyond all possible storms of comedy. The recent compiler of a most admirably skilful and most delicately invaluable compendium of Pantagruel or manual by way of guidebook to Rabelais has but too justly taken note of the irrefragable evidence there given that the one prose humourist who is to Aristophanes as the human twin-star Castor to Pollux the divine can never have practically weathered an actual gale ; but if I may speak from a single experience of one which a witness long inured to Indian storm as well as Indian battle had never seen matched out of the tropics if ever overmatched within them,

I should venture to say, were the poet in question any other mortal man than Shakespeare, to whom all things were better known by instinct than ever they can be to others by experience, that the painter of the storm in *Pericles* must have shared the adventure and relished the rapture of such an hour. None other most assuredly than himself alone could have mingled with the material passion of the elements such human passion of pathos as thrills in such tenderly sublime undertone of an agony so nobly subdued through the lament of Pericles over Thaisa. As in his opening speech of this scene we heard all the clangour and resonance of warring wind and sea, so now we hear a sound of sacred and spiritual music as solemn as the central monochord of the inner main itself.

That the three last acts of *Pericles*, with the possible if not over probable exception of the so-called Chorus,¹ are wholly the work of Shakespeare in the ripest fullness of his latter genius, is a position which needs exactly as much proof as does his single-handed authorship of *Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. In the fifth act is a remarkable instance of a thing remarkably rare with him : the recast or repetition in an improved and reinvigorated form of a beautiful image or passage occurring in a previous play. The now only too famous metaphor of ' patience on a monument smiling at grief '—too famous we might call it for its own fame—is transfigured as from human beauty to divine, in its transformation to the comparison of Marina's look with that of ' Patience gazing

¹ It is worth remark that in a still older sample of an older and ruder form of play than can have been the very earliest mould in which the pristine or pre-Shakespearean model of *Pericles* was cast, the part of Chorus here assigned to Gower was filled by a representative of his fellow-poet Lydgate.

on kings' graves, and smiling Extremity out of act.' A precisely similar parallel is one to which I have referred elsewhere : that between the two passages respectively setting forth the reciprocal love of Helena and Hermia, of Emilia and Flavina. The change of style and spirit in either case of reiteration is the change from a simpler to a sublimer form of beauty.

In the two first acts of *Pericles* there are faint and rare but evident and positive traces of a passing touch from the hasty hand of Shakespeare : even here too we may say after Dido :—

Nec tam aversus equos Tyriâ sol jungit ab urbe.

It has been said that those most unmistakable verses on 'the blind mole' are not such as any man could insert into another man's work, or slip in between the lines of an inferior poet : and that they occur naturally enough in a speech of no particular excellence. I take leave decisively to question the former assertion, and flatly to contradict the latter. The pathetic and magnificent lines in dispute do not occur naturally enough, or at all naturally, among the very poor, flat, creeping verses between which they have been thrust with such over free-handed recklessness. No purple patch was ever more pitifully out of place. There is indeed no second example of such wanton and wayward liberality ; but the generally lean and barren style of these opening acts does not crawl throughout on exactly the same low level.

The last of the only three plays with which I venture to find any fault on the score of moral taste is the first on my list of the only three plays belonging to this last period on which, as they now stand, I trace the indisputable track of another touch than Shakespeare's. But in the two cases remaining our general task of

distinction should on the whole be simple and easy enough for the veriest babes and sucklings in the lower school of Shakespeare.

That the two great posthumous fragments we possess of Shakespeare's uncompleted work are incomplete simply because the labour spent on either was cut short by his timeless death is the first natural assumption of any student with an eye quick enough to catch the point where the traces of his hand break off ; but I should now be inclined to guess rather that on reconsideration of the subjects chosen he had rejected or dismissed them for a time at least as unfit for dramatic handling. It could have needed no great expenditure of reasoning or reflection to convince a man of lesser mind and less experience than Shakespeare's that no subject could possibly be more unmanageable, more indomitably improper for such a purpose, than he had selected in *Timon of Athens*. How he came ever to fall across such a subject, to hit upon such a choice, we can spend no profitable time or pains in trying to conjecture. It is clear, however, that at all events there was a season when the inexplicable attraction of it was too strong for him to resist the singular temptation to embody in palpable form, to array in dramatic raiment, to invest with imaginative magnificence, the godless ascetic passion of misanthropy, the martyrdom of an atheistic Stylites. Timon is doubtless a man of far nobler type than any monomaniac of the tribe of Macarius : but his immeasurable superiority in spiritual rank to the hermit-fathers of the desert serves merely to make him a thought madder and a grain more miserable than the whole Thebaid of Christomaniacs rolled into one. Foolish and fruitless as it has ever been to hunt through Shakespeare's plays and sonnets on the false

scent of a fantastic trail, to put thaumaturgic trust in a dark dream of tracking his untraceable personality through labyrinthine byways of life and visionary cross-roads of character, it is yet surely no blind assumption to accept the plain evidence in both so patent before us, that he too like other men had his dark seasons of outer or of inner life, and like other poets found them or made them fruitful as well as bitter, though it might be but of bitter fruit. And of such there is here enough to glut the gorge of all the monks in monkery, or strengthen for a forty days' fast any brutallest unwashed theomaniac of the Thebaid. The most unconscionably unclean of all foul-minded fanatics might have been satisfied with the application to all women from his mother upwards of the monstrous and magnificent obloquy found by Timon as insufficient to overwhelm as his gold was inadequate to satisfy one insatiable and indomitable 'brace of harlots.' In *Troilus and Cressida* we found too much that Swift might have written when half inspired by the genius of Shakespeare ; in the great and terrible fourth act of *Timon* we find such tragedy as Juvenal might have written when half deified by the spirit of Æschylus.

There is a noticeable difference between the case of *Timon* and the two other cases (diverse enough between themselves) of late or mature work but partially assignable to the hand of Shakespeare. In *Pericles* we may know exactly how much was added by Shakespeare to the work of we know not whom ; in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* we can tell sometimes to a hair's breadth in a hemistich by whom how much was added to the posthumous text of Shakespeare ; in *Timon* we cannot assert with the same confidence in the same accuracy that just so many scenes and no more, just so many

speeches and none other, were the work of Shakespeare's or of some other hand. Throughout the first act his presence lightens on us by flashes, as his voice peals out by fits, from behind or above the too meanly decorated altar of tragic or satiric song : in the second it is more sensibly continuous ; in the third it is all but utterly eclipsed ; in the fourth it is but very rarely intercepted for a very brief interval in the dark divine service of a darker Communion Day : in the fifth it predominates generally over the sullen and brooding atmosphere with the fierce imperious glare of a ' bloody sun ' like that which the wasting shipmen watched at noon ' in a hot and copper sky.' There is here no more to say of a poem inspired at once by the triune Furies of Ezekiel, of Juvenal, and of Dante.

I can imagine no reason but that already suggested why Shakespeare should in a double sense have taken Chaucer for his model or example in leaving half told a story which he had borrowed from the father and master of our narrative poetry. Among all competent scholars and all rational students of Shakespeare there can have been, except possibly with regard to three of the shorter scenes, no room for doubt or perplexity on any detail of the subject since the perfect summary and the masterly decision of Mr. Dyce. These three scenes, as no such reader will need to be told or reminded, are the two first soliloquies of the Gaoler's Daughter after the release of Palamon, and the scene of the portraits, as we may in a double sense call it, in which Emilia, after weighing against each other in solitude the likenesses of the cousins, receives from her own kinsfolk a full and laboured description of their leading champions on either side. Even setting apart for once and for a moment the sovereign evidence of mere style, we must recognise in this last instance

a beautiful and significant example of that loyal and loving fidelity to the minor passing suggestions of Chaucer's text which on all possible occasions of such comparison so markedly and vividly distinguishes the work of Shakespeare's from the work of Fletcher's hand. Of the pestilent abuse and perversion to which Fletcher has put the perhaps already superfluous hints or sketches by Shakespeare for an episodical underplot, in his transmutation of Palamon's love-stricken and luckless deliverer into the disgusting burlesque of a mock Ophelia, I have happily no need as I should certainly have no patience to speak.¹

After the always immitigable gloom of *Timon* and the sometimes malodorous exhalations of the three preceding plays, it is nothing less than 'very heaven' to find and feel ourselves again in the midmost Paradise, the central Eden, of Shakespeare's divine discovery —of his last sweet living invention. Here again is air as pure blowing over fields as fragrant as where Dante saw Matilda or Milton saw Proserpine gathering each as deathless flowers. We still have here to disentwine or disentangle his own from the weeds of glorious and of other than glorious feature with which Fletcher has thought fit to interweave them; even in the close of the last scene of all we can say to a line, to a letter, where Shakespeare ends and Fletcher begins. That scene is opened by Shakespeare in his most majestic vein of meditative or moral verse, pointed and coloured as usual with him alone by direct and absolute aptitude to the immediate sentiment and situation of the speaker

¹ Except perhaps one little word of due praise for the pretty imitation or recollection of his dead friend Beaumont rather than of Shakespeare, in the description of the crazed girl whose 'careless tresses a wreath of bullrush rounded' where she sat playing with flowers for emblems at a game of love and sorrow—but liker in all else to Bellario by another fountain-side than to Ophelia by the brook of death.

and of no man else : then either Fletcher strikes in for a moment with a touch of somewhat more Shakespearean tone than usual, or possibly we have a survival of some lines' length, not unretouched by Fletcher, from Shakespeare's first sketch for a conclusion of the somewhat calamitous and cumbrous underplot, which in any case was ultimately left for Fletcher to expand into such a shape and bring by such means to such an end as we may safely swear that Shakespeare would never have admitted : then with the entrance and ensuing narrative of Pirithous we have none but Shakespeare before us again, though it be Shakespeare undoubtedly in the rough, and not as he might have chosen to present himself after due revision, with rejection (we may well suppose) of this point and readjustment of that : then upon the arrival of the dying Arcite with his escort there follows a grievous little gap, a flaw but pitifully patched by Fletcher, whom we recognise at wellnigh his worst and weakest in Palamon's appeal to his kinsman for a last word, 'if his heart, *his worthy, manly heart*' (an exact and typical example of Fletcher's tragically prosaic and prosaically tragic dash of incurable commonplace), 'be yet unbroken,' and in the flaccid and futile answer which fails so signally to supply the place of the most famous and pathetic passage in all the masterpiece of Chaucer ; a passage to which even Shakespeare could have added but some depth and grandeur of his own giving, since neither he nor Dante's very self nor any other among the divinest of men could have done more or better than match it for tender and pure simplicity of words more 'dearly sweet and bitter' than the bitterest or the sweetest of men's tears. Then, after the duly and properly conventional engagement on the parts of Palamon and Emilia respectively to devote the anni-

versary ‘to tears’ and ‘to honour,’ the deeper note returns for one grand last time, grave at once and sudden and sweet as the full choral opening of an anthem: the note which none could ever catch of Shakespeare’s very voice gives out the peculiar cadence that it alone can give in the modulated instinct of a solemn change or shifting of the metrical emphasis or *ictus* from one to the other of two repeated words:—

That nought could buy
Dear love, but loss of dear love !

That is a touch beyond the ear or the hand of Fletcher: a chord sounded from Apollo’s own harp after a somewhat hoarse and reedy wheeze from the scrannel-pipe of a lesser player than Pan. Last of all, in words worthy to be the latest left of Shakespeare’s, his great and gentle Theseus winds up the heavenly harmonies of his last beloved great poem.

And now, coming at length within the very circle of Shakespeare’s culminating and crowning constellation, bathing my whole soul and spirit for the last and (if I live long enough) as surely for the first of many thousand times in the splendours of the planet whose glory is the light of his very love itself, standing even as Dante

in the clear
Amorous silence of the Swooning-sphere,

what shall I say of thanksgiving before the final feast of Shakespeare?

The grace must surely be short enough if it would at all be gracious. Even were Shakespeare’s self alive again, or he now but fifteen years since gone home to Shakespeare,¹ of whom Charles Lamb said well that

¹ On the 17th of September, 1864.

none could have written his book about Shakespeare but either himself alone or else he of whom the book was written, yet could we not hope that either would have any new thing to tell us of *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Cymbeline*. And for ourselves, what else could we do but only ring changes on the word beautiful as Celia on the word wonderful in her laughing litany of love? or what better or what more can we do than, in the deepest and most heartfelt sense of an old conventional phrase, thank God and Shakespeare? for how to praise either for such a gift of gifts we know not, knowing only and surely that none will know for ever.

True or false, and it would now seem something less than likely to be true, the fancy which assumed the last lines spoken by Prospero to be likewise the last words of the last completed work of Shakespeare was equally in either case at once natural and graceful. There is but one figure sweeter than Miranda's and sublimer than Prospero's in all the range of heaven on which the passion of our eyes could rest at parting. And from one point of view there is even a more heavenly quality perceptible in the light of this than of its two twin stars. In no nook or corner of the island as we leave it is any savour left or any memory lingering of any inexpiable evil. Alonso is absolved; even Antonio and Sebastian have made no such ineffaceable mark on it by the presence of their pardoned crimes as is made by those which cost the life of Mamillius and the labours of Imogen. Poor Caliban is left in such comfort as may be allowed him by divine grace in the favourable aspect of Setebos; and his comrades go by us 'reeling ripe' and 'gilded' not by 'grand liquor' only but also by the summer lightning of men's laughter: blown softly out of our

sight, with a sound and a gust of music, by the breath of the song of Ariel.

The wild wind of *The Winter's Tale* at its opening would seem to blow us back into a wintrier world indeed. And to the very end I must confess that I have in me so much of the spirit of Rachel weeping in Ramah as will not be comforted because Mamillius is not. It is well for those whose hearts are light enough, to take perfect comfort even in the substitution of his sister Perdita for the boy who died of 'thoughts high for one so tender.' Even the beautiful suggestion that Shakespeare as he wrote had in mind his own dead little son still fresh and living at his heart can hardly add more than a touch of additional tenderness to our perfect and piteous delight in him. And even in her daughter's embrace it seems hard if his mother should have utterly forgotten the little voice that had only time to tell her just eight words of that ghost story which neither she nor we were ever to hear ended. Any one but Shakespeare would have sought to make pathetic profit out of the child by the easy means of showing him if but once again as changed and stricken to the death for want of his mother and fear for her and hunger and thirst at his little high heart for the sight and touch of her : Shakespeare only could find a better way, a subtler and a deeper chord to strike, by giving us our last glimpse of him as he laughed and chattered with her 'past enduring,' to the shameful neglect of those ladies in the natural blueness of whose eyebrows as well as their noses he so stoutly declined to believe. And at the very end (as aforesaid) it may be that we remember him all the better because the father whose jealousy killed him and the mother for love of whom he died would seem to have forgotten the little brave sweet spirit with all its truth of love

and tender sense of shame as perfectly and unpardonably as Shakespeare himself at the close of *King Lear* would seem to have forgotten one who never had forgotten Cordelia.

But yet—and here for once the phrase abhorred by Cleopatra does not ‘allay the good’ but only the bad ‘precedence’—if ever amends could be made for such unnatural show of seeming forgetfulness (“out on the seeming! I will write against it”—or would, had I not written enough already), the poet most assuredly has made such amends here. At the sunrise of Perdita beside Florizel it seems as if the snows of sixteen winters had melted all together into the splendour of one unutterable spring. They ‘smell April and May’ in a sweeter sense than it could be said of ‘young Master Fenton’: ‘nay, which is more,’ as his friend and champion Mistress Quickly might have added to mine host’s commendatory remark, they speak all April and May; because April is in him as naturally as May in her, by just so many years’ difference before the Mayday of her birth as went to make up her dead brother’s little lot of living breath, which in Beaumont’s most lovely and Shakespeare-worthy phrase ‘was not a life; was but a piece of childhood thrown away.’ Nor can I be content to find no word of old affection for Autolycus, who lived, as we may not doubt, though but a hint or promise be vouchsafed us for all assurance that he lived by favour of his ‘good masters’ once more to serve Prince Florizel and wear three-pile for as much of his time as it might please him to put on ‘robes’ like theirs that were ‘gentlemen born,’ and had ‘been so any time these four hours.’ And yet another and a graver word must be given with all reverence to the ‘grave and good Paulina,’ whose glorious fire of godlike indignation was as warmth and

cordial to the innermost heart while yet bruised and wrung for the yet fresh loss of Mamillius.

The time is wellnigh come now for me to consecrate in this book my good will if not good work to the three-fold and thrice happy memory of the three who have written of Shakespeare as never man wrote, nor ever man may write again ; to the everlasting praise and honour and glory of Charles Lamb, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Walter Savage Landor ; ‘wishing,’ I hardly dare to say, ‘what I write may be read by their light.’ The play of plays, which is *Cymbeline*, remains alone to receive the last salute of all my love.

I think, as far as I can tell, I may say I have always loved this one beyond all other children of Shakespeare. The too literal egoism of this profession will not be attributed by any candid or even commonly honest reader to the violence of vanity so much more than comical as to make me suppose that such a record or assurance could in itself be matter of interest to any man : but simply to the real and simple reason, that I wish to show cause for my choice of this work to wind up with, beyond the mere chance of its position at the close of the chaotically inconsequent catalogue of contents affixed to the first edition. In this casualty—for no good thing can reasonably be ascribed to design on the part of the first editors—there would seem to be something more than usual of what we may call, if it so please us, a happy providence. It is certain that no studious arrangement could possibly have brought the book to a happier end. Here is depth enough with height enough of tragic beauty and passion, terror and love and pity, to approve the presence of the most tragic Master’s hand ; subtlety enough of sweet and bitter truth to attest the passage of the mightiest and wisest scholar or teacher in the

school of the human spirit ; beauty with delight enough and glory of life and grace of nature to proclaim the advent of the one omnipotent Maker among all who bear that name. Here above all is the most heavenly triad of human figures that ever even Shakespeare brought together ; a diviner three, as it were a living god-garland of the noblest earth-born brothers and loveworthiest heaven-born sister, than the very givers of all grace and happiness to their Grecian worshippers of old time over long before. The passion of Posthumus is noble, and potent the poison of Iachimo ; Cymbeline has enough for Shakespeare's present purpose of 'the king-becoming graces' ; but we think first and last of her who was 'truest speaker' and those who 'called her brother, when she was but their sister ; she them brothers, when they were so indeed.' The very crown and flower of all her father's daughters,—I do not speak here of her human father, but her divine—the woman above all Shakespeare's women is Imogen. As in Cleopatra we found the incarnate sex, the woman everlasting, so in Imogen we find half glorified already the immortal godhead of womanhood. I would fain have some honey in my words at parting—with Shakespeare never, but for ever with these notes on Shakespeare ; and I am therefore something more than fain to close my book upon the name of the woman best beloved in all the world of song and all the tide of time ; upon the name of Shakespeare's Imogen.

APPENDIX

NOTE ON THE HISTORICAL PLAY OF *KING EDWARD III.*

1879

THE epitaph of German criticism on Shakespeare was long since written by the unconscious hand which penned the following sentence ; an inscription worthy of perpetual record on the registers of Gotham or in the daybook of the yet unstranded Ship of Fools.

‘*Thomas Lord Cromwell : Sir John Oldcastle : A Yorkshire Tragedy.*—The three last pieces are not only unquestionably Shakespeare’s, but in my opinion they deserve to be classed among his best and most maturest works.’

This memorable opinion is the verdict of the modest and judicious Herr von Schlegel : who had likewise in his day the condescension to inform our ignorance of the melancholy fact so strangely overlooked by the contemporaries of Christopher Marlowe, that ‘his verses are flowing, but without energy.’ Strange, but true ; too strange, we may reasonably infer, not to be true. Only to German eyes has the treasure-house of English poetry ever disclosed a secret of this kind : to German ears alone has such discord or default been ever perceptible in its harmonies.

Now the facts with regard to this triad of plays are briefly these. *Thomas Lord Cromwell* is a piece of such utterly shapeless, spiritless, bodiless, soulless, senseless, helpless, worthless rubbish, that there is no known writer of Shakespeare’s age to whom it could be ascribed without the infliction of an unwarrantable insult on that writer’s memory. *Sir John Oldcastle* is the compound piecework of four

one of them afterwards and otherwise eminent as a poet—Munday, Drayton, Wilson, and Hathaway: a thin sample of poetic patchery cobbled up and stitched together so as to serve its hour for a season without falling to pieces at the first touch. *The Yorkshire Tragedy* is a coarse, crude, and vigorous impromptu, in which we possibly might almost think it possible that Shakespeare had a hand (or at least a finger), if we had any reason to suppose that during the last ten or twelve years of his life¹ he was likely to have taken part in any such dramatic improvisation.

The example and the exposure of Schlegel's misadventures in this line have not sufficed to warn off minor blunderers from treading with emulous confidence 'through forthrights and meanders' in the very muddiest of their precursor's traces. We may notice, for one example, the revival—or at least the discussion as of something worth serious notice—of a wellnigh still-born theory, first dropped in a modest corner of the critical world exactly a hundred and seventeen years ago. Its parent, notwithstanding this perhaps venial indiscretion, was apparently an honest and modest gentleman; and the play itself, which this ingenuous theorist was fain, with all diffidence, to try whether haply he might be permitted to foist on the apocryphal fatherhood of Shakespeare, is not without such minor merits as may excuse us for wasting a few minutes on examination of the theory which seeks to confer on it the factitious and artificial attraction of a spurious and adventitious interest.

'The Raigne of King Edward the third: As it hath bin sundrie times plaied about the Citie of London,' was published in 1596, and ran through two or three anonymous editions before the date of the generation was out which first produced it. Having thus run to the end of its natural tether, it fell as naturally into the oblivion which has devoured, and has not

¹ The once too celebrated crime which in this play was exhibited on the public stage with the forcible fidelity of a wellnigh brutal realism took actual place on the private stage of fact in the year 1604. Four years afterwards the play was published as Shakespeare's. Eight years more, and Shakespeare was with Æschylus.

again disgorged, so many a more precious production of its period. In 1760 it was reprinted in the 'Prolusions' of Edward Capell, whose text is now before me. This editor was the first mortal to suggest that his newly unearthed treasure might possibly be a windfall from the topless tree of Shakespeare. Being, as I have said, a duly modest and an evidently honest man, he admits 'with candour' that there is no jot or tittle of 'external evidence' whatsoever to be alleged in support of this gratuitous attribution : but he submits, with some fair show of reason, that there is a certain 'resemblance between the style of' Shakespeare's 'earlier performances and of the work in question'; and without the slightest show of any reason whatever he appends to this humble and plausible plea the unspeakably unhappy assertion that at the time of its appearance 'there was no known writer equal to such a play'; whereas at a moderate computation there were, I should say, on the authority of Henslowe's Diary, at least a dozen—and not improbably a score. In any case there was one then newly dead, too long before his time, whose memory stands even higher above the possible ascription of such a work than that of the adolescent Shakespeare's very self.

Of one point we may be sure, even where so much is unsure as we find it here : in the curt atheological phrase of the Persian Lucretius, 'one thing is certain, and the rest is lies.' The author of *King Edward III.* was a devout student and a humble follower of Christopher Marlowe, not yet wholly disengaged by that august and beneficent influence from all attraction towards the 'jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits'; and fitter on the whole to follow this easier and earlier vein of writing, half lyrical in manner and half elegiac, than to brace upon his punier limbs the young giant's newly fashioned buskin of blank verse. The signs of this growing struggle, the traces of this incomplete emancipation, are perceptible throughout in the alternate prevalence of two conflicting and irreconcilable styles; which yet affords no evidence or suggestion of a double authorship. For the intelligence which moulds and informs the whole work, the spirit which pervades and imbues the general design, is of a piece, so to speak,

throughout ; a point imperceptible to the eye, a touchstone intangible by the finger, alike of a scholiast and a dunce.

Another test, no less unmistakable by the student and no less indiscernible to the sciolist, is this : that whatever may be the demerits of this play, they are due to no voluntary or involuntary carelessness or haste. Here is not the swift impatient journeywork of a rough and ready hand ; here is no sign of such compulsory hurry in the discharge of a task something less than welcome, if not of an imposition something less than tolerable, as we may rationally believe ourselves able to trace in great part of Marlowe's work : in the latter half of *The Jew of Malta*, in the burlesque interludes of *Doctor Faustus*, and wellnigh throughout the whole scheme and course of *The Massacre at Paris*. Whatever in *King Edward III.* is mediocre or worse is evidently such as it is through no passionate or slovenly precipitation of handiwork, but through pure incompetence to do better. The blame of the failure, the shame of the shortcoming, cannot be laid to the account of any momentary excess or default in emotion, of passing exhaustion or excitement, of intermittent impulse and reaction ; it is an indication of lifelong and irremediable impotence. And it is further to be noted that by far the least unsuccessful parts of the play are also by far the most unimportant. The capacity of the author seems to shrink and swell alternately, to erect its plumes and deject them, to contract and to dilate the range and orbit of its flight in a steady inverse degree to the proportionate interest of the subject or worth of the topic in hand. There could be no surer proof that it is neither the early nor the hasty work of a great or even a remarkable poet. It is the best that could be done at any time by a conscientious and studious workman of technically insufficient culture and of naturally limited means.

I would not, however, be supposed to undervalue the genuine and graceful ability of execution displayed by the author at his best. He could write at times very much after the earliest fashion of the adolescent Shakespeare ; in other words, after the fashion of the day or hour, to which in some degree the greatest writer of that hour or that day cannot

choose but conform at starting, and the smallest writer must needs conform for ever. By the rule which would attribute to Shakespeare every line written in his first manner which appeared during the first years of his poetic progress, it is hard to say what amount of bad verse or better, current during the rise and the reign of their several influences,—for this kind of echo or of copywork, consciously or unconsciously repercussive and reflective, begins with the very first audible sound of a man's voice in song, with the very first noticeable stroke of his hand in painting—it is hard to say what amount of tolerable or intolerable work might not or may not be assignable by scholiasts of the future to Byron or to Shelley, to Mr. Tennyson or to Mr. Browning. A time by this rule might come—but I am fain to think better of the Fates—when by comparison of detached words and collation of dismembered phrases the memory of Mr. Tennyson would be weighted and degraded by the ascription of whole volumes of pilfered and diluted verse now current—if not yet submerged—under the name or the pseudonym of the present¹ Viceroy—or Vice-empress is it?—of India. But the obvious truth is this: the voice of Shakespeare's adolescence had as usual an echo in it of other men's notes: I can remember the name of but one poet whose voice from the beginning had none; who started with a style of his own, though he may have chosen to annex—‘ annex the wise it call’; *convey* is obsolete—to annex whole phrases or whole verses at need, for the use or the ease of an idle minute; and this name of course is Marlowe's. So starting, Shakespeare had yet (like all other and lesser poets born) some perceptible notes in his yet half boyish voice that were not borrowed; and these were at once caught up and re-echoed by such fellow-pupils with Shakespeare of the young Master of them all—such humbler and feebler disciples, or simpler sheep (shall we call them?) of the great ‘dead shepherd’—as the now indistinguishable author of *King Edward III.*

In the first scene of the first act the impotent imitation of Marlowe is pitifully patent. Possibly there may also be an imitation of the still imitative style of Shakespeare, and the

• ¹ Written in 1879.

style may be more accurately definable as a copy of a copy—a study after the manner of Marlowe, not at second hand, but at third. In any case, being obviously too flat and feeble to show a touch of either godlike hand, this scene may be set aside at once to make way for the second.

The second scene is more animated, but low in style till we come to the outbreak of rhyme. In other words, the energetic or active part is at best passable—fluent and decent commonplace : but where the style turns undramatic and runs into mere elegiacs, a likeness becomes perceptible to the first elegiac style of Shakespeare. Witness these lines spoken by the King in contemplation of the Countess of Salisbury's beauty, while yet struggling against the nascent motions of a base love :—

Now in the sun alone it doth not lie
 With light to take light from a mortal eye :
 For here two day-stars that mine eyes would see
 More than the sun steal mine own light from me.
 Contemplative desire ! desire to be
 In contemplation that may master thee !

Decipit exemplar vitiis imitabile : if Shakespeare ever saw or heard these pretty lines, he should have felt the unconscious rebuke implied in such close and facile imitation of his own early elegiacs. As a serious mimicry of his first manner, a critical parody summing up in little space the sweet faults of his poetic nonage, with its barren overgrowth of unprofitable flowers—bright point, soft metaphor, and sweet elaborate antithesis—this is as good of its kind as anything between Aristophanes and Horace Smith. Indeed, it may remind us of that parody on the soft, superfluous, flowery and frothy style of Agathon, which at the opening of the *Thesmophoriazusæ* cannot but make the youngest and most ignorant reader laugh, though the oldest and most learned has never set eyes on a line of the original verses which supplied the incarnate god of comic song with matter for such exquisite burlesque.

To the speech above cited the reply of the Countess is even

gracefuller, and closer to the same general model of fanciful elegiac dialogue :-

Let not thy presence, like the April sun,
Flutter our worth, and suddenly be gone :
More happy do not make our outward wall
Than thou will grace our inward house withal.
Our house, my barge, is like a country swain,
Whose habit rude, and manners blunt and plain,
Presteth naught ; yet truly beautified
With beauty's riches, and fair hidden pride :
For where the golden ore doth buried lie,
The ground, undecked with nature's tapestry,
Seemeth barren, bare, unseemly, scutless, dry ;
And where the upper turf of earth doth bear
His pride, perfume,³ and pattenloured east,
Delve there, and find this issue and their pride
To spring from ordure and corruption's side.
But, to make up my all too long compare,
These ragged walls no testimony are
What is within ; but, like a cloak, doth hide
From weather's waste the under garnished pride.
More gracious than my terms can let thee be,
Entreat thyself to stay awhile with me.

Not only the exquisite grace of this charming last couplet, but the smooth sound strength, the fluency and clarity of the whole passage, may serve to show that the original suggestion of Capell, if (as I think) untenable, was not (we must admit) unpardonable. The very oversight perceptible to any eye and painful to any ear not sealed up by stepdame nature from all perception of pleasure or of pain derivable from good verse or bad--the reckless reiteration of the same rhyme with but one poor couplet intervening--suggests rather the oversight of an unsledged poet than the obtuseness of a full-grown poeticule or poetaster.

But of how many among the servile or semi-servile throng of imitators in every generation may not as much as this be

³ Capell has altered this to ' proud perfumes ' ; marking the change in a note, with the scrupulous honesty which would seem to have usually distinguished him from more daring and more famous editors.

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said by tolerant or kindly judges ! Among the herd of such diminutives as swarm after the heel or fawn upon the hand of Mr. Tennyson, more than one, more than two or three, have come as close as his poor little viceregal or vice-imperial parasite to the very touch and action of the master's hand which feeds them unawares from his platter as they fawn ; as close as this nameless and short-winded satellite to the gesture and the stroke of Shakespeare's. For this also must be noted ; that the resemblance here is but of stray words, of single lines, of separable passages. The whole tone of the text, the whole build of the play, the whole scheme of the poem, is far enough from any such resemblance. The structure, the composition, is feeble, incongruous, inadequate, effete. Any student will remark at a first glance what a short-breathed runner, what a broken-winded athlete in the lists of tragic verse, is the indiscernible author of this play.

There is another point which the Neo-Shakespearean synagogue will by no man be expected to appreciate ; for to apprehend it requires some knowledge and some understanding of the poetry of the Shakespearean age—so surely we now should call it, rather than Elizabethan or Jacobean, for the sake of verbal convenience, if not for the sake of literary decency ; and such knowledge or understanding no sane man will expect to find in any such quarter. Even in the broad coarse comedy of the period we find here and there the same sweet and simple echoes of the very cradle-song (so to call it) of our drama : so like Shakespeare, they might say who knew nothing of Shakespeare's fellows, that we cannot choose but recognise his hand. Here as always first in the field—the genuine and golden harvest-field of Shakespearean criticism, Charles Lamb has cited a passage from *Green's Tu Quoque*—a comedy miserably misprinted in Dodsley's *Old Plays*—on which he observes that 'this is so like Shakespeare, that we seem to remember it,' being as it is a girl's gentle lamentation over the selfish, exacting, suspicious and trustless love of man, as contrasted with the swift simple surrender of a woman's love at the first heartfelt appeal to her pity—'we seem to remember it,' says Lamb, as a speech of Desdemona uttered

on a first perception or suspicion of jealousy or alienation in Othello. This lovely passage, if I dare say so in contravention to the authority of Lamb, is indeed as like the manner of Shakespeare as it can be—to eyes ignorant of what his fellows can do ; but it is not like the manner of the Shakespeare who wrote *Othello*. This, however, is beside the question. It is very like the Shakespeare who wrote the *Comedy of Errors*—*Love's Labour's Lost*—*Romeo and Juliet*. It is so like that had we fallen upon it in any of these plays it would long since have been a household word in all men's mouths for sweetness, truth, simplicity, perfect and instinctive accuracy of touch. It is very much like the first manner of Shakespeare than any passage in *King Edward III*. And no Sham Shakespearean critic that I know of has yet assigned to the hapless object of his howling homage the authorship of *Green's Tu Quoque*.

Returning to our text, we find in the short speech of the King with which the first act is wound up yet another couplet which has the very ring in it of Shakespeare's early notes—the catch at words rather than play on words which his tripping tongue in youth could never resist :—

Countess, albeit my business urgeth me,
It shall attend while I attend on thee.

And with this pretty little instance of courtly and courteous euphuism we pass from the first to the second and most important act in the play.

Any reader well versed in the text of Shakespeare, and ill versed in the work of his early rivals and his later pupils, might surely be forgiven if on a first reading of the speech with which this act opens he should cry out with Capell that here at least was the unformed hand of the Master perceptible and verifiable indeed. The writer, he might say, has the very glance of his eye, the very trick of his gait, the very note of his accent. But on getting a little more knowledge, such a reader will find the use of it in the perception to which he will have attained that in his early plays, as in his two early poems, the style of Shakespeare was not for the most part distinctively his own. It was that of a crew, a knot of young writers, among

whom he found at once both leaders and followers to be guided and to guide. A mere glance into the rich lyric literature of the period will suffice to show the dullest eye and teach the densest ear how nearly innumerable were the Englishmen of Elizabeth's time who could sing in the courtly or pastoral key of the season, each man of them a few notes of his own, simple or fantastic, but all sweet, clear, genuine of their kind :

Facies non omnibus una,
Nec diversa tamen :

and yet so close is the generic likeness between flower and flower of the same lyrical garden that the first half of the quotation seems but half applicable here. In Bird's, Morley's, Dowland's collections of music with the words appended—in such jewelled volumes as *England's Helicon* and *Davison's Poetical Rhapsody*—their name is Legion, their numbers are numberless. You cannot call them imitators, this man of that, or all of any ; they were all of one school, but it was a school without a master or a head. And even so it was with the earliest sect or gathering of dramatic writers in England. Marlowe alone stood apart and above them all—the young Shakespeare among the rest ; but among these we cannot count, we cannot guess, how many were wellnigh as competent as he to continue the fluent rhyme, to prolong the facile echo, of Greene and Peele, their first and most famous leaders.

No more docile or capable pupil could have been desired by any master in any art than the author of *David and Bethsabe* has found in the writer of this second act. He has indeed surpassed his model, if not in grace and sweetness, yet in taste or tact of expression, in continuity and equality of style. Vigour is not the principal note of his manner, but compared with the soft effusive ebullience of his master's we may fairly call it vigorous and condensed. But all this merit or demerit is matter of mere language only. The poet—a very pretty poet in his way, and doubtless capable of gracious work enough in the idyllic or elegiac line of business—shows about as much capacity to grasp and handle the fine intimacies of character and the large issues of circumstance to any tragic or dramatic

purpose, as might be expected from an idyllic or elegiac poet who should suddenly assume the buskin of tragedy. Let us suppose that Moschus, for example, on the strength of having written a sweeter elegy than ever before was chanted over the untimely grave of a friend and fellow-singer, had said within himself, ‘ Go to, I will be Sophocles ’; can we imagine that the tragic result would have been other than tragical indeed for the credit of his gentle name, and comical indeed for all who might have envied the mild and modest excellence which fashion or hypocrisy might for years have induced them to besprinkle with the froth and slaver of their promiscuous and pointless adulation ?

As the play is not more generally known than it deserves to be—or perhaps we may say it is somewhat less known, though its claim to general notice is faint indeed compared with that of many a poem of its age familiar only to special students in our own—I will transcribe a few passages to show how far the writer could reach at his best ; leaving for others to indicate how far short of that not inaccessible point he is too generally content to fall and to remain.

The opening speech is spoken by one Lodowick, a parasite of the King’s ; who would appear, like François Villon under the roof of his Fat Madge, to have succeeded in reconciling the professional duties—may I not say, the generally discordant and discrepant offices ?—of a poet and a pimp.

I might perceive his eye in her eye lost,
 His ear to drink her sweet tongue’s utterance ;
 And changing passion, like inconstant clouds,
 That, racket upon the carriage of the winds,
 Increase, and die, in his disturbèd cheeks.
 Lo, when she blushed, even then did he look pale ;
 As if her cheeks by some enchanted power
 Attracted had the cherry blood from his :¹

¹ The feeble archaic inversion in this line is one among many small signs which all together suffice, if not to throw back the date of this play to the years immediately preceding the advent of Marlowe or the full influence of his genius and example, yet certainly to mark it as an instance of survival from that period of incomposite and inadequate workmanship in verse.

A STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE

Anon, with reverent fear when she grew pale,
 His cheeks put on their scarlet ornaments ;
 But no more like her oriental red
 Than brick to coral, or live things to dead.¹
 Why did he then thus counterfeit her looks ?
 If she did blush, 'twas tender modest shame,
 Being in the sacred presence of a king ;
 If he did blush, 'twas red immodest shame
 To vail his eyes amiss, being a king ;
 If she looked pale, 'twas silly woman's fear
 To bear herself in presence of a king ;
 If he looked pale, it was with guilty fear
 To dote amiss, being a mighty king.

This is better than the insufferable style of *Locrine*, which is in great part made up of such rhymeless couplets, each tagged with an empty verbal antithesis ; but taken as a sample of dramatic writing, it is but just better than what is utterly intolerable. Dogberry has defined it exactly ; it is most tolerable—and not to be endured.

The following speech of King Edward is in that better style of which the author's two chief models were not at their best incapable for awhile under the influence and guidance (we may suppose) of their friend Marlowe.

She is grown more fairer far since I came hither ;
 Her voice more silver every word than other,
 Her wit more fluent. What a strange discourse
 Unfolded she of David and his Scots !
Even thus, quoth she, *he spake*—and then spake broad,
 With epithets and accents of the Scot ;
 But somewhat better than the Scot could speak :
And thus, quoth she—and answered then herself ;
 For who could speak like her ? but she herself
 Breathes from the wall an angel's note from heaven
 Of sweet defiance to her barbarous foes.
 When she would talk of peace, methinks her tongue

¹ Or than this play to a genuine work of Shakespeare's. ' Brick to coral'—these three words describe exactly the difference in tone and shade of literary colour.

Commanded war to prison ;¹ when of war,
 It wakened Cæsar from his Roman grave
 To hear war beautified by her discourse.
 Wisdom is foolishness, but in her tongue ;
 Beauty a slander, but in her fair face ;
 There is no summer but in her cheerful looks,
 Nor frosty winter but in her disdain.
 I cannot blame the Scots that did besiege her,
 For she is all the treasure of our land ;
 But call them cowards that they ran away,
 Having so rich and fair a cause to stay.

But if for a moment we may fancy that here and there we have caught such an echo of Marlowe as may have fallen from the lips of Shakespeare in his salad days, in his period of poetic pupilage, we have but a very little way to go forward before we come upon indisputable proof that the pupil was one of feebler hand and fainter voice than Shakespeare. Let us take the passage on poetry, beginning—

Now, Lodowick, invoke² some golden Muse
 To bring thee hither an enchanted pen ;

¹ Here for the first time we come upon a verse not unworthy of Marlowe himself—a verse in spirit as in cadence recalling the deep oceanic reverberations of his ‘mighty line,’ profound and just and simple and single as a note of the music of the sea. But it would be hard if a devout and studious disciple were never to catch one passing tone of his master’s habitual accent. It may be worth while to observe that we find here the same modulation of verse—common enough since then, but new to the patient auditors of *Gorboduc* and *Locrine*—which we find in the finest passage of Marlowe’s imperfect play of *Dido*, completed by Nash after the young Master’s untimely death.

Why star’st thou in my face ? If thou wilt stay,
 Leap in my arms : mine arms are open wide :
 If not—turn from me, and I ’ll turn from thee ;
 For though thou hast the power to say farewell,
 I have not power to stay thee.

But we may look long in vain for the like of this passage, taken from the crudest and feeblest work of Marlowe, in the wide and wordy expanse of *King Edward III.*

² A pre-Shakespearean word of single occurrence in a single play of Shakespeare’s, and proper to the academic school of playwrights.

and so forth. No scholar in English poetry but will recognise at once the flat and futile imitation of Marlowe ; not of his great general style alone, but of one special and transcendent passage which can never be too often quoted.

If all the pens that ever poets held
 Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
 And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
 Their minds, and muses on admirèd themes ;
 If all the heavenly quintessence they still
 From their immortal flowers of poesy,
 Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
 The highest reaches of a human wit ;
 If these had made one poem's period,
 And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
 Yet should there hover in their restless heads
 One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
 Which into words no virtue can digest.¹

Infinite as is the distance between the long roll of these mighty lines and the thin tinkle of their feeble imitator's, yet we cannot choose but catch the ineffectual note of a would-be echo in the speech of the King to his parasite—

For so much moving hath a poet's pen, etc., etc.

It is really not worth while to transcribe the poor meagre versicles at length : but a glance at the text will show how much fitter was their author to continue the tradition of Peele than to emulate the innovations of Marlowe. In the speeches that follow there is much pretty verbiage after the general manner of Elizabethan sonnetteers, touched here and there with something of a higher tone ; but the whole scene drags, flags, halts onward at such a languid rate, that to pick out all the prettiest lines by way of sample would give a favourable impression but ~~too~~^{too} likely to be reversed on further and fuller acquaintance.

Forget not to set down, how passionate,
 How heart-sick, and how full of languishment,
 Her beauty makes me. . . .
 Write on, while I peruse her in my thoughts.

¹ *The First Part of Tamburlaine the Great*, Act i. Sc. ii.

Her voice to music, or the nightingale :
 To music every summer-leaping swain
 Compares his sunburnt lover when she speaks ;
 And why should I speak of the nightingale ?
 The nightingale sings of adulterate wrong ;
 And that, compared, is too satirical :
 For sin, though sin, would not be so esteemed ;
 But rather virtue sin, sin virtue deemed.
 Her hair, far softer than the silkworm's twist,
 Like as a flattering glass, doth make more fair
 The yellow amber :—*Like a flattering glass*
 Comes in too soon ; for, writing of her eyes,
 I 'll say that like a glass they catch the sun,
 And thence the hot reflection doth rebound
 Against my breast, and burns the heart within.
 Ah, what a world of descent makes my soul
 Upon this voluntary ground of love !

' Pretty enough, very pretty ! but ' exactly as like and as near the style of Shakespeare's early plays as is the style of Constable's sonnets to that of Shakespeare's. Unless we are to assign to the Master every unaccredited song, sonnet, elegy, tragedy, comedy, and farce of his period, which bears the same marks of the same date—a date, like our own, of too prolific and imitative production—as we find inscribed on the greater part of his own early work ; unless we are to carry even as far as this the audacity and arrogance of our sciolism, we must somewhere make a halt—and it must be on the near side of such an attribution as that of *King Edward III.* to the hand of Shakespeare.

With the disappearance of the poetic pimp and the entrance of the unsuspecting Countess, the style rises yet again—and really, this time, much to the author's credit. It would need a very fine touch from a very powerful hand to improve on the delicacy and dexterity of the prelude or overture to the King's avowal of adulterous love. But when all is said, though very delicate and very dexterous, it is not forcible work : I do not mean by forcible the same as violent, spasmodic, emphatic beyond the modesty of nature ; a poet is of course only to be commended, and that heartily, for keeping within this

bound ; but he is not to be commended for coming short of it. This whole scene is full of mild and temperate beauty, of fanciful yet earnest simplicity ; but the note of it, the expression, the dominant key of the style, is less appropriate to the utterance of a deep and deadly passion than—at the utmost—of what modern tongues might call a strong and rather dangerous flirtation. Passion, so to speak, is quite out of this writer's call ; the depths and heights of manly as of womanly emotion are alike beyond his reach.

Thought and affliction, passion, hell itself,
He turns to favour and to prettiness.

' To favour and to prettiness ' ; the definition of his utmost merit and demerit, his final achievement and shortcoming, is here complete and exact. Witness the sweet quiet example of idyllic work which I extract from a scene beginning in the regular amœbæan style of ancient pastoral.

EDWARD. Thou hear'st me say that I do dote on thee.

COUNTESS. If on my beauty, take it if thou canst ;
Though little, I do prize it ten times less :
If on my virtue, take it if thou canst ;
For virtue's store by giving doth augment :
Be it on what it will that I can give
And thou canst take away, inherit it.

EDWARD. It is thy beauty that I would enjoy.

COUNTESS. O, were it painted, I would wipe it off,
And dispossess myself to give it thee :
But, sovereign, it is soldered to my life :
Take one and both ; for like an humble shadow
It haunts the sunshine of my summer's life.

EDWARD. But thou mayst lend it me to sport withal

COUNTESS. As easy may my intellectual soul
Be lent away, and yet my body live,
As lend my body, palace to my soul.
Away from her, and yet retain my soul.
My body is her bower, her court, her abbey,
And she an angel, pure, divine, unspotted ;
If I should lend her house, my lord, to thee,
I kill my poor soul, and my poor soul me.

Once more, this last couplet is very much in the style of Shakespeare's sonnets ; nor is it wholly unlike even the dramatic style of Shakespeare in his youth—and some dozen other poets or poeticules of the time. But throughout this part of the play the recurrence of a faint and intermittent resemblance to Shakespeare is more frequently noticeable than elsewhere.¹ A student of imperfect memory but not of defective intuition might pardonably assign such couplets, on hearing them cited, to the master-hand itself ; but such a student would be likelier to refer them to the sonneteer than to the dramatist. And a casual likeness to the style of Shakespeare's sonnets is not exactly sufficient evidence to warrant such an otherwise unwarrantable addition or appendage to the list of Shakespeare's plays.

A little further on we come upon the first and last passage which does actually recall by its wording a famous instance of the full and ripened style of Shakespeare.

He that doth clip or counterfeit your stamp
 Shall die, my lord : and will your sacred self
 Commit high treason 'gainst the King of heaven,
 To stamp his image in forbidden metal,
 Forgetting your allegiance and your oath ?
 In violating marriage' sacred law
 You break a greater honour than yourself ;
 To be a king is of a younger house
 Than to be married : your progenitor,
 Sole reigning Adam on the universe,
 By God was honoured for a married man,
 But not by him anointed for a king.

Every possible reader, I suppose, will at once bethink himself of the famous passage in *Measure for Measure* which here may seem to be faintly prefigured :

It were as good
 To pardon him that hath from nature stolen

¹ It may be worth a remark that the word *power* is constantly used as a dissyllable ; another note of archaic debility or insufficiency in metre.

A man already made, as to remit
 Their saucy sweetness, that do coin heaven's image
 In stamps that are forbid :

and the very difference of style is not wider than the gulf which gapes between the first style of Shakespeare and the last. But men of Shakespeare's stamp, I venture to think, do not thus repeat themselves. The echo of the passage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, describing the girlish friendship of Hermia and Helena, which we find in the first act of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, describing the like girlish friendship of Emilia and Flavina, is an echo of another sort. Both, I need hardly say, are unquestionably Shakespeare's; but the fashion in which the matured poet retouches and completes the sketch of his earlier years—composes an oil painting, as it were, from the hints and suggestions of a water-colour sketch long since designed and long since half forgotten—is essentially different from the mere verbal and literal trick of repetition which sciolists might think to detect in the present instance. Again we must needs fall back on the inevitable and indefinable test of style; a test which could be of no avail if we were foolish enough to appeal to scholiasts and their attendant dunces, but which should be of some avail if we appeal to experts and their attentive scholars; and by this test we can but remark that neither the passage in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* nor the corresponsive passage in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* could have been written by any hand known to us but Shakespeare's; whereas the passage in *King Edward III.* might as certainly have been written by any one out of a dozen poets then living as the answering passage in *Measure for Measure* could assuredly have been written by Shakespeare alone.

As on a first reading of the *Hippolytus* of Euripides we feel that, for all the grace and freshness and lyric charm of its opening scenes, the claim of the poem to our ultimate approval or disapproval must needs depend on the success or failure of the first interview between Theseus and his calumniated son; and as on finding that scene to be feeble and futile and prosaic and verbose we feel that the poet who had a woman's spite against women has here effectually and finally shown himself powerless to handle the simplest elements of masculine

passion, of manly character and instinct ; so in this less important case we feel that the writer, having ventured on such a subject as the compulsory temptation of a daughter by a father, who has been entrapped into so shameful an undertaking through the treacherous exaction of an equivocal promise unwarily confirmed by an inconsiderate oath, must be judged by the result of his own enterprise ; must fall or stand as a poet by its failure or success. And his failure is only not complete ; he is but just redeemed from utter discomfiture by the fluency and simplicity of his equable but inadequate style. Here as before we find plentiful examples of the gracefully conventional tone current among the lesser writers of the hour.

WARWICK. How shall I enter on this graceless errand ?
 I must not call her child ; for where 's the father
 That will in such a suit seduce his child ?
 Then, *Wife of Salisbury* ;—shall I so begin ?
 No, he 's my friend ; and where is found the friend
 That will do friendship such endamagement ?¹—
 Neither my daughter, nor my dear friend's wife,
 I am not Warwick, as thou think'st I am,
 But an attorney from the court of hell ;
 That thus have housed my spirit in his form
 To do a message to thee from the king.

This beginning is fair enough, if not specially fruitful in promise ; but the verses following are of the flattest order of commonplace. Hay and grass and the spear of Achilles—of which tradition

the moral is,
 What mighty men misdo, they can amend—

these are the fresh and original types on which our little poet is compelled to fall back for support and illustration to a scene so full of terrible suggestion and pathetic possibility.

The king will in his glory hide thy shame ;
 And those that gaze on him to find out thee
 Will lose their eyesight, looking on the sun.

¹ Yet another essentially non-Shakespearean word, though doubtless once used by Shakespeare ; this time a most ungraceful Gallicism.

A STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE

What can one drop of poison harm the sea,
 Whose hugy vastures can digest the ill
 And make it lose its operation ?

And so forth, and so forth ; *ad libitum* if not *ad nauseam*.
 Let us take but one or two more instances of the better sort.

COUNTESS. Unnatural besiege ! Woe me unhappy,
 To have escaped the danger of my foes,
 And to be ten times worse invir'd by friends !

(Here we come upon two more words unknown to Shakespeare ;¹ *besiege*, as a noun substantive, and *invir'd* for *environed*.)

Hath he no means to stain my honest blood
 But to corrupt the author of my blood
 To be his scandalous and vile soliciter ?
 No marvel though the branches be infected,
 When poison hath encompassed the roots ;
 No marvel though the leprous infant die,
 When the stern dam envenometh the dug.
 Why then, give sin a passport to offend,
 And youth the dangerous rein of liberty ;
 Blot out the strict forbidding of the law ;
 And cancel every canon that prescribes
 A shame for shame or penance for offence.
 No, let me die, if his too boisterous will
 Will have it so, before I will consent
 To be an actor in his graceless lust.

WARWICK. Why, now thou speak'st as I would
 have thee speak ;
 And mark how I unsay my words again.
 An honourable grave is more esteemed
 Than the polluted closet of a king ;
 'The greater man, the greater is the thing,

¹ It may obviate any chance of mistake if I observe that here as elsewhere, when I mention the name that is above every name in English literature, I refer to the old Shakespeare, and not to 'the new Shakspeare' ; a *nomen* homo with whom I have no acquaintance, and with whom (if we may judge of a great—or a little—unknown after the appearance and the bearing of those who select him as a social sponsor for themselves and their literary catechumens) I can most sincerely assert that I desire to have none.

Be it good or bad, that he shall undertake ;
 An unreputed mote, flying in the sun,
 Presents a greater substance than it is ;
 The freshest summer's day doth soonest taint
 The loathèd carrion that it seems to kiss ;
 Deep are the blows made with a mighty axe ;
 That sin doth ten times aggravate itself
 That is committed in a holy place ;
 An evil deed, done by authority,
 Is sin, and subornation : Deck an ape
 In tissue, and the beauty of the robe
 Adds but the greater scorn unto the beast.

(Here are four passably good lines, which vaguely remind the reader of something better read elsewhere ; a common case enough with the more tolerable work of small imitative poets.)

A spacious field of reasons could I urge
 Between his glory, daughter, and thy shame :
 That poison shows worst in a golden cup ;
 Dark night seems darker by the lightning flash ;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds ;
 And every glory that inclines to sin,
 The shame is treble by the opposite.
 So leave I, with my blessing in thy bosom ;
 Which then convert to a most heavy curse,
 When thou convert'st from honour's golden name
 To the black faction of bed-blotting shame !

[Exit.]

COUNTESS. I 'll follow thee :—And when my mind turns so,
 My body sink my soul in endless woe ! [Exit.]

So much for the central and crowning scene, the test, the climax, the hinge on which the first part of this play turns ; and seems to me, in turning, to emit but a feeble and rusty squeak. No probable reader will need to be reminded that the line which I have perhaps unnecessarily italicised appears also as the last verse in the ninety-fourth of those 'sugared sonnets' which we know were in circulation about the time of this play's first appearance among Shakespeare's 'private friends' ; in other words, which enjoyed such a kind of public privacy or private publicity as one or two among the most eminent English poets of our own day have occasionally chosen

for some part of their work, to screen it for a while as under the shelter and the shade of crepuscular laurels, till ripe for the sunshine or the storm of public judgment. In the present case, this debatable verse looks to me more like a loan or maybe a theft from Shakespeare's private store of undramatic poetry than a misapplication by its own author to dramatic purposes of a line too apt and exquisite to endure without injury the transference from its original setting.

The scene ensuing winds up the first part of this composite (or rather, in one sense of the word, *incomposite*) poem. It may, on the whole, be classed as something more than passably good : it is elegant, lively, even spirited in style ; showing at all events a marked advance upon the scene which I have already stigmatised as a failure—that which attempts to render the interview between Warwick and the King. It is hardly, however, I should say, above the highest reach of Greene or Peele at the smoothest and straightest of his flight. At its opening, indeed, we come upon a line which inevitably recalls one of the finest touches in a much later and deservedly more popular historical drama. On being informed by Derby that

The king is in his closet, malcontent,
For what I know not, but he gave in charge,
Till after dinner, none should interrupt him ;
The Countess Salisbury, and her father Warwick,
Artois, and all, look underneath the brows ;

on receiving, I say, this ominous intimation, the prompt and statesmanlike sagacity of Audley leads him at once as by intuition to the inference thus eloquently expressed in a strain of thrilling and exalted poetry ;

Undoubtedly, then something is amiss.

Who can read this without a reminiscence of Sir Christopher Hatton's characteristically cautious conclusion at sight of the military preparations arrayed against the immediate advent of the Armada ?

I cannot but surmise—forgive, my friend,
If the conjecture 's rash—I cannot but
Surmise the state some danger apprehends !

With the entrance of the King the tone of this scene naturally rises—‘in good time,’ as most readers will say. His brief interview with the two nobles has at least the merit of ease and animation.

DERBY. Befall my sovereign all my sovereign’s wish !

EDWARD. Ah, that thou wert a witch, to make it so !

DERBY. The emperor greeteth you.

EDWARD. Would it were the countess !

DERBY. And hath accorded to your highness’ suit.

EDWARD. Thou liest, she hath not : But I would she had !

AUDLEY. All love and duty to my lord the king !

EDWARD. *Well, all but one is none* :—What news with you ?

AUDLEY. I have, my liege, levied those horse and foot,
According to your charge, and brought them hither.

EDWARD. Then let those foot trudge hence upon those horse
According to their discharge, and begone.—

Derby, I ’ll look upon the countess’ mind

Anon.

DERBY. The countess’ mind, my liege ?

EDWARD. I mean, the emperor :—Leave me alone.

AUDLEY. What ’s in his mind ?

DERBY. Let ’s leave him to his humour.

[*Exeunt DERBY and AUDLEY.*

EDWARD. Thus from the heart’s abundance speaks the tongue
Countess for emperor : And indeed, why not ?

She is as *imperator* over me ;

And I to her

- Am as a kneeling vassal, that observes

The pleasure or displeasure of her eye.

In this little scene there is perhaps on the whole more general likeness to Shakespeare’s earliest manner than we can trace in any other passage of the play. But how much of Shakespeare’s earliest manner may be accounted the special and exclusive property of Shakespeare ?

After this dismissal of the two nobles, the pimping poeticule, Villon manqué or (whom shall we call him ?) réussí, reappears with a message to Cæsar (as the King is pleased to style himself) from ‘the more than Cleopatra’s match’ (as he designates the Countess), to intimate that ‘ere night she will resolve his

majesty.' Hereupon an unseasonable 'drum within' provokes Edward to the following remonstrance :

What drum is this, that thunders forth this march,
To start the tender Cupid in my bosom ?
Poor sheepskin, how it brawls with him that beateth it !
Go, break the thundering parchment bottom out,
And I will teach it to conduct sweet lines

(' That 's bad ; *conduct sweet lines* is bad.')

Unto the bosom of a heavenly nymph :
For I will use it as my writing paper ;
And so reduce him, from a scolding drum,
To be the herald, and dear counsel-bearer,
Betwixt a goddess and a mighty king.
Go, bid the drummer learn to touch the lute,
Or hang him in the braces of his drum ;
For now we think it an uncivil thing
To trouble heaven with such harsh resounds.
Away !

[Exit LODOWICK.]

The quarrel that I have requires no arms
But these of mine ; and these shall meet my foe
In a deep march of penetrable groans ;
My eyes shall be my arrows ; and my sighs
Shall serve me as the vantage of the wind
To whirl away my sweetst¹ artillery :
Ah, but, alas, she wins the sun of me,
For that is she herself ; and thence it comes
That poets term the wanton warrior blind ;
But love hath eyes as judgment to his steps,
Till too much lovèd glory dazzles them.

Hereupon Lodowick introduces the Black Prince (that is to be), and 'retires to the door.' The following scene opens well, with a tone of frank and direct simplicity.

EDWARD. I see the boy. O, how his mother's face,
Moulded in his, corrects my strayed desire,
And rates my heart, and chides my thievish eye ;
Who, being rich enough in seeing her,

¹ Surely, for *sweetst* we should read *swiftst*.

Yet seeks elsewhere : and basest theft is that
Which cannot check itself on poverty.—
Now, boy, what news ?

PRINCE. I have assembled, my dear lord and father,
The choicest buds of all our English blood,
For our affairs in France ; and here we come
To take direction from your majesty.

EDWARD. Still do I see in him delineate
His mother's visage ; those his eyes are hers,
Who, looking wistly¹ on me, made me blush ;
For faults against themselves give evidence :
Lust is a fire ; and men, like lanterns, show
Light lust within themselves even through themselves.
Away, loose silks of wavering vanity !
Shall the large limit of fair Brittany²
By me be overthrown ? and shall I not
Master this little mansion of myself ?
Give me an armour of eternal steel ;
I go to conquer kings. And shall I then
Subdue myself, and be my enemy's friend ?
It must not be.—Come, boy, forward, advance !
Let's with our colours sweep the air of France.

Here Lodowick announces the approach of the Countess
'with a smiling cheer.'

EDWARD. Why, there it goes ! that very smile of hers
Hath ransomed captive France ; and set the king,
The dauphin, and the peers, at liberty.—
Go, leave me, Ned, and revel with thy friends. [Exit PRINCE.
Thy mother is but black ; and thou, like her,
Dost put into my mind how foul she is.
Go, fetch the countess hither in thy hand,

¹ This word occurs but once in Shakespeare's plays—

And speaking it, he wistly looked on me ;

(*King Richard II.*, Act v. Sc. 4.)

and in such a case, as in the previous instances of the words *invocate* and *endamagement*, a mere $\delta\pi\alpha\xi\lambda\epsilon\gamma\delta\mu\epsilon\nu\tau\omega$ can carry no weight of evidence with it worth any student's consideration.

² This form is used four times by Shakespeare as the equivalent of Bretagne ; once only, in one of his latest plays, as a synonym for Britain.

And let her chase away these winter clouds ;
For she gives beauty both to heaven and earth.

[Exit LODOWICK.]

The sin is more, to hack and hew poor men,
Than to embrace in an unlawful bed
The register of all varieties ¹
Since leathern Adam till this youngest hour.

Re-enter LODOWICK with the COUNTESS.

Go, Lodowick, put thy hand into my purse,
Play, spend, give, riot, waste ; do what thou wilt,
So thou wilt hence awhile, and leave me here. [Exit LODOWICK.]

Having already, out of a desire and determination to do no possible injustice to the actual merits of this play in the eyes of any reader who might never have gone over the text on which I had to comment, exceeded in no small degree the limits I had intended to impose upon my task in the way of citation, I shall not give so full a transcript from the next and last scene between the Countess and the King.

EDWARD. Now, my soul's playfellow ! art thou come
To speak the more than heavenly word of yea
To my objection in thy beauteous love ?

(Again, this singular use of the word *objection* in the sense of offer or proposal has no parallel in the plays of Shakespeare.)

COUNTESS. My father on his blessing hath commanded—

EDWARD. That thou shalt yield to me.

COUNTESS. Ay, dear my liege, your due.

EDWARD. And that, my dearest love, can be no less
Than right for right, and render ² love for love.

COUNTESS. Than wrong for wrong, and endless hate for hate.
But, sith I see your majesty so bent,
That my unwillingness, my husband's love,
Your high estate, nor no respect respected,

¹ Another word indiscernible in any genuine verse of Shakespeare's, though not (I believe) unused on occasion by some among the poets contemporary with his earlier years.

² This word was perhaps unnecessarily altered by our good Capell to 'tender.'

Can be my help, but that your mightiness
 Will overbear and awe these dear regards,
 I bind my discontent to my content,
 And what I would not I 'll compel I will ;
 Provided that yourself remove those lets
 That stand between your highness' love and mine.

EDWARD. Name them, fair countess, and by heaven I will.

COUNTESS. It is their lives that stand between our love
 That I would have choked up, my sovereign.

EDWARD. Whose lives, my lady ?

COUNTESS. My thrice loving liege,
 Your queen, and Salisbury my wedded husband ;
 Who living have that title in our love
 That we can not bestow but by their death.

EDWARD. Thy opposition ¹ is beyond our law.

COUNTESS. So is your desire : If the law ²
 Can hinder you to execute the one,
 Let it forbid you to attempt the other :
 I cannot think you love me as you say
 Unless you do make good what you have sworn.

EDWARD. No more : thy husband and the queen shall die.
 Fairer thou art by far than Hero was ;
 Beardless Leander not so strong as I :
 He swam an easy current for his love ;
 But I will, through a helly spout of blood,³
 Arrive that Sestos where my Hero lies..

¹ Yet another and a singular misuse of a word never so used or misused by Shakespeare.

² Qu. Why, so is your desire : If that the law, etc. ?

³ Sic. I should once have thought it impossible that any mortal ear could endure the shock of this unspeakable and incomparable verse, and find in the passage which contains it an echo or a trace of the 'music, wit, and oracle' of Shakespeare. But in those days I had yet to learn what manner of ears are pricked up to listen 'when rank Thersites opes his mastiff jaws' in criticism of Homer or of Shakespeare. In a corner of the preface to an edition of 'Shakspere' which bears on its title-page the name (correctly spelt) of Queen Victoria's youngest son prefixed to the name I have just transcribed, a small pellet of dry dirt was flung upwards at me from behind by the 'able editor' thus irritably impatient to figure in public as the volunteer valet or literary lackey of Prince Leopold. Hence I gathered the edifying assurance that this aspirant to the honours of literature in livery had been reminded of my humbler attempts in literature without

But, drawing on, their glorious bright aspect,
 Their streaming ensigns wrought of coloured silk,
 Like to a meadow full of sundry flowers,
 Adorns the naked bosom of the earth ;

and so on after the exactest and therefore feeblest fashion of the Pre-Marlowites ; with equal regard, as may be seen, for grammar and for sense in the construction of his periods. The narrative of a sea-fight ensuing on this is pitiable beyond pity and contemptibly beneath contempt.

In the next scene we have a flying view of peasants in flight, with a description of five cities on fire not undeserving of its place in the play, immediately after the preceding sea-piece : but relieved by such wealth of pleasantry as marks the following jest, in which the most purblind eye will be the quickest to discover a touch of the genuine Shakespearean humour.

1ST FRENCHMAN. What, is it quarter-day, that you remove,
 And carry bag and baggage too ?

2ND FRENCHMAN. Quarter-day ? ay, and quartering-day, I fear.

Euge !

The scene of debate before Cressy is equally flat and futile, vulgar and verbose ; yet in this Sham Shakespearean scene of our present poeticule's I have noted one genuine Shakespearean word, ' solely singular for its singleness.'

So may thy temples with Bellona's hand
 Be still adorned with laurel victory !

In this notably inelegant expression of goodwill we find the same use of the word ' laurel ' as an adjective and epithet of victory which thus confronts us in the penultimate speech of the third scene in the first act of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Upon your sword
 Sit laurel victory, and smooth success
 Be strewed before your feet !

There is something more (as less there could not be) of spirit and movement in the battle-scene where Edward refuses

to send relief to his son, wishing the prince to win his spurs unaided, and earn the firstfruits of his fame single-handed against the heaviest odds ; but the forcible feebleness of a minor poet's fancy shows itself amusingly in the mock stoicism and braggart philosophy of the King's reassuring reflection, ' We have more sons than one.'

In the first and third scenes of the fourth act we may concede some slight merit to the picture of a chivalrous emulation in magnanimity between the Duke of Burgundy and his former fellow-student, whose refusal to break his parole as a prisoner extorts from his friend the concession refused to his importunity as an envoy : but the execution is by no means worthy of the subject.

The limp loquacity of long-winded rhetoric, so natural to men and soldiers in an hour of emergency, which distinguishes the dialogue between the Black Prince and Audley on the verge of battle, is relieved by this one last touch of quasi-Shakespearean thought or style discoverable in the play of which I must presently take a short—and a long—farewell.

Death's name is much more mighty than his deeds :
 Thy parcelling this power hath made it more.
 As many sands as these my hands can hold
 Are but my handful of so many sands ;
 Then all the world—and call it but a power—
 Easily ta'en up, and ¹ quickly thrown away ;
 But if I stand to count them sand by sand
 The number would confound my memory
 And make a thousand millions of a task
 Which briefly is no more indeed than one.
 These quartered squadrons and these regiments
 Before, behind us, and on either hand,
 Are but a power : When we name a man,
 His hand, his foot, his head, have several strengths ;
 And being all but one self instant strength,
 Why, all this many, Audley, is but one,
 And we can call it all but one man's strength.
 He that hath far to go tells it by miles ;

¹ The simple substitution of the word ' is ' for the word ' and ' would rectify the grammar here—were that worth while.

À tout seigneur tout honneur; the author deserves some dole of moderate approbation for his tribute to the national chivalry of a Frenchman as here exemplified in the person of Prince Charles.

Of the two next scenes, in which the battle of Poitiers is so inadequately 'staged to the show,' I can only say that if any reader believes them to be the possible work of the same hand which set before all men's eyes for all time the field of Agincourt, he will doubtless die in that belief, and go to his own place in the limbo of commentators.

But a yet more flagrant effect of contrast is thrust upon our notice at the opening of the fifth act. If in all the historical groundwork of this play there is one point of attraction which we might have thought certain to stimulate the utmost enterprise and evoke the utmost capacities of an aspiring dramatist, it must surely be sought in the crowning scene of the story; in the scene of Queen Philippa's intercession for the burgesses of Calais. We know how Shakespeare on the like occasion was wont to transmute into golden verse the silver speech supplied to him by North's version of Amyot's Plutarch.¹ With the text of Lord Berners before him, the author of *King Edward III.* has given us for the gold of Froissart not even adulterated copper, but unadulterated lead. Incredulous as it may seem to readers of the historian, the poeticule has actually contrived so far to transfigure by dint of disfiguring him that this most noble and pathetic scene in all the annals of chivalry, when passed through the alembic of his incompetence, appears in a garb of transforming verse under a guise at once weak and wordy, coarse and unchivalrous. The whole scene is at all points alike in its unlikeness to the workmanship of Shakespeare.

Here then I think we may finally draw bridle: for the rest of the course is not worth running; there is nothing in the residue of this last act which deserves analysis or calls for commentary. We have now examined the whole main body of the work with somewhat more than necessary care; and

¹ I choose for a parallel Shakespeare's use of Plutarch in the composition of his Roman plays rather than his use of Hall and Holinshed in the composition of his English histories, because Froissart is a model more properly to be set against Plutarch than against Holinshed or Hall.

our conclusion is simply this : that if any man of common reading, common modesty, common judgment, and common sense, can be found to maintain the theory of Shakespeare's possible partnership in the composition of this play, such a man will assuredly admit that the only discernible or imaginable touches of his hand are very slight, very few, and very early. For myself, I am and have always been perfectly satisfied with one single and simple piece of evidence that Shakespeare had not a finger in the concoction of *King Edward III.* He was the author of *King Henry V.*

NOTE

I WAS not surprised to hear that my essay on the historical play of *King Edward III.* had on its first appearance met in various quarters with assailants of various kinds. There are some forms of attack to which no answer is possible for a man of any human self-respect but the lifelong silence of contemptuous disgust. To such as these I will never descend to advert or to allude further than by the remark now as it were forced from me, that never once in my life have I had or will I have recourse in self-defence either to the blackguard's loaded bludgeon of personalities or to the dastard's sheathed dagger of disguise. I have reviled no man's person : I have outraged no man's privacy. When I have found myself misled either by imperfection of knowledge or of memory, or by too much confidence in a generally trustworthy guide, I have silently corrected the misquotation or readily repaired the error. To the successive and representative heroes of the undying Dunciad I have left and will always leave the foul use of their own foul weapons. I have spoken freely and fearlessly, and so shall on all occasions continue to speak, of what I find to be worthy of praise or dispraise, contempt or honour, in the public works and actions of men. Here ends and here has always ended in literary matters the proper province of a gentleman ; beyond it, though sometimes intruded on in time past by trespassers of a nobler race, begins the proper province of a blackguard.

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS ON THE FIRST
ANNIVERSARY SESSION OF THE NEWEST
SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY

A PAPER was read by Mr. A. on the disputed authorship of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He was decidedly of opinion that this play was to be ascribed to George Chapman. He based this opinion principally on the ground of style. From its similarity of subject he had at first been disposed to assign it to Cyril Tourneur, author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*; and he had drawn up in support of this theory a series of parallel passages extracted from the speeches of Vindice in that drama and of Oberon in the present play. He pointed out, however, that the character of Puck could hardly have been the work of any English poet but the author of *Bussy d'Ambois*. There was here likewise that gravity and condensation of thought conveyed through the medium of the 'full and heightened style', commended by Webster, and that preponderance of philosophic or political discourse over poetic interest and dramatic action for which the author in question had been justly censured.

Some of the audience appearing slightly startled by this remark (indeed it afterwards appeared that the Chairman had been on the point of asking the learned member whether he was not thinking rather of *Love's Labour's Lost*?), Mr. A. cited the well-known scene in which Oberon discourses with Puck on matters concerning Mary Stuart and Queen Elizabeth. This was universally accepted as proof positive, and the reading concluded amid signs of unanimous assent, when

Mr. B. had nothing to urge against the argument they had just heard, but he must remind them that there was a more weighty kind of evidence than that adduced by Mr. A.; and to this he doubted not they would all defer. He could prove by a tabulated statement that the words 'to' and 'from' occurred on an average ~~in~~^{ie'} seven to nine times in every play

of Chapman ; whereas in the play under consideration the word ' to ' occurred exactly twelve times and the word ' from ' precisely ten. He was therefore of opinion that the authorship should in all probability be assigned to Anthony Munday.

As nobody present could dispute this conclusion, Mr. C. proceeded to read the argument by which he proposed to establish the fact, hitherto unaccountably overlooked by all preceding commentators, that the character of Romeo was obviously designed as a satire on Lord Burghley. The first and perhaps the strongest evidence in favour of this proposition was the extreme difficulty, he might almost say the utter impossibility, of discovering a single point of likeness between the two characters. This would naturally be the first precaution taken by a poor player who designed to attack an all-powerful Minister. But more direct light was thrown upon the subject by a passage in which ' that kind of fruit that maids call medlars when they laugh alone ' is mentioned in connection with a wish of Romeo's regarding his mistress. This must evidently be taken to refer to some recent occasion on which the policy of Lord Burghley (possibly in the matter of the Anjou marriage) had been rebuked in private by the Maiden Queen, ' his mistress,' as meddling, laughable, and fruitless.

This discovery seemed to produce a great impression till the Chairman reminded the Society that the play in question was now generally ascribed to George Peele,¹ who was notoriously the solicitor of Lord Burghley's patronage and the recipient of his bounty. That this poet was the author of *Romeo and Juliet* could no longer be a matter of doubt, as he was confident they would all agree with him on hearing that a living poet of note had positively assured him of the fact ; adding that he had always thought so when at school. The plaudits excited by this announcement had scarcely subsided, when the Chairman clutched the matter by observing

¹ This brilliant idea has since been borrowed from the Chairman—and that without acknowledgment—by one of those worthies whose mission it is to make manifest that no burlesque invention of mere man's device can improve upon the inexhaustible capacities of Nature as shown in the production and perfection of the type irreverently described by Dryden as ' God Almighty's fool.'

that he rather thought the same opinion had ultimately been entertained by his own grandmother.

Mr. D. then read a paper on the authorship and the hidden meaning of two contemporary plays which, he must regretfully remark, were too obviously calculated to cast a most unfavourable and even sinister light on the moral character of the new Shakespeare; whose possibly suspicious readiness to attack the vices of others with a view to diverting attention from his own was signally exemplified in the well-known fact that, even while putting on a feint of respect and tenderness for his memory, he had exposed the profligate habits and habits of Christopher Marlowe under the transparent pseudonym of Christopher Sly. To the first of these plays attention had long since been drawn by a person of whom it was only necessary to say that he had devoted a long life to the study and illustration of Shakespeare and his age, and had actually presumed to publish a well-known edition of the poet at a date previous to the establishment of the present Society. He (Mr. D.) was confident that not another syllable could be necessary to expose that person to the contempt of all present. He proceeded, however, with the kind encouragement of the Chairman, to indulge at that editor's expense in sundry personalities both 'loose and humorous,' which being totally unfit for publication here are reserved for a private issue of 'Loose and Humorous Papers' to be edited, with a running marginal commentary or illustrative and explanatory version of the utmost possible fullness,¹ by the Founder and another member of the Society. To these it might possibly be undesirable for them to attract the notice of the outside world. Reverting therefore to his first subject, from various references to the presumed private character, habits, gait, appearance, and bearing of the gentleman in question, Mr. D. observed that the ascription of a share in *The Taming of the Shrew* to William Haughton (hitherto supposed the author of a comedy called *Englishmen for my Money*) implied a doubly discreditable

¹ This word was incomprehensibly misspelt in the first issue of the Society's Report, where it appeared as 'foolness.' To prevent misapprehension, the whole staff of printers was at once discharged.

blunder. The real fact, as he would immediately prove, was not that Haughton was joint author with Shakespeare of *The Taming of the Shrew*, but that Shakespeare was joint author with Haughton of *Englishmen for my Money*. He would not enlarge on the obvious fact that Shakespeare, so notorious a plunderer of others, had actually been reduced to steal from his own poor store an image transplanted from the last scene of the third act of *Romeo and Juliet* into the last scene of the third act of *Englishmen for my Money*; where the well-known and pitiful phrase—‘Night’s candles are burnt out’—reappears in all its paltry vulgarity as follows: ‘Night’s candles burn obscure.’ Ample as was the proof here supplied, he would prefer to rely exclusively upon such further evidence as might be said to lie at once on the surface and in a nutshell.

The second title of this play, by which the first title was in a few years totally superseded, ran thus: *A Woman will have her Will*. Now even in an age of punning titles such as that of a well-known and delightful treatise by Sir John Harrington, the peculiar fondness of Shakespeare for puns was notorious; but especially for puns on names, as in the proverbial case of Sir Thomas Lucy; and above all for puns on his own Christian name, as in his 135th, 136th, and 143rd sonnets. It must now be but too evident to the meanest intelligence—to the meanest intelligence, he repeated; for to such only did he or would he then and there or ever or anywhere address himself—(loud applause)—that the graceless author, more utterly lost to all sense of shame than any Don Juan or other typical libertine of fiction, had come forward to placard by way of self-advertisement on his own stage, and before the very eyes of a Maiden Queen, the scandalous confidence in his own powers of fascination and seduction so cynically expressed in the too easily intelligible vaunt—*A Woman will have her Will* [Shakespeare]. In the penultimate line of the hundred and forty-third sonnet the very phrase might be said to occur:—

So will I pray that thou mayst have thy Will.

Having thus established his case in the first instance to the satisfaction, as he trusted, not only of the present Society,

but of any asylum for incurables in any part of the country, the learned member now passed on to the consideration of the allusions at once to Shakespeare and to a celebrated fellow-countryman, fellow-poet, and personal friend of his—Michael Drayton—contained in a play which had been doubtfully attributed to Shakespeare himself by such absurd idiots as looked rather to the poetical and dramatic quality of a poem or a play than to such tests as those to which alone any member of that Society would ever dream of appealing. What these were he need not specify; it was enough to say in recommendation of them that they had rather less to do with any question of dramatic or other poetry than with the differential calculus or the squaring of the circle. It followed that only the most perversely ignorant and æsthetically presumptuous of readers could imagine the possibility of Shakespeare's concern or partnership in a play which had no more Shakespearean quality about it than mere poetry, mere passion, mere pathos, mere beauty and vigour of thought and language, mere command of dramatic effect, mere depth and subtlety of power to read, interpret, and reproduce the secrets of the heart and spirit. Could any further evidence be required of the unfitness and unworthiness to hold or to utter any opinion on the matter in hand which had consistently been displayed by the poor creatures to whom he had just referred, it would be found, as he felt sure the Founder and all worthy members of their Society would be the first to admit, in the despicable diffidence, the pitiful modesty, the contemptible deficiency in common assurance, with which the suggestion of Shakespeare's partnership in this play had generally been put forward and backed up. The tragedy of *Arden of Feversham* was indeed connected with Shakespeare—and that, as he should proceed to show, only too intimately; but Shakespeare was not connected with it—that is, in the capacity of its author. In what capacity would be but too evident when he mentioned the names of the two leading ruffians concerned in the murder of the principal character—Black Will and Shakebag. The single original of these two characters he need scarcely pause to point out. It would be observed that

a double precaution had been taken against any charge of libel or personal attack which might be brought against the author and supported by the all-powerful court influence of Shakespeare's two principal patrons, the Earls of Essex and Southampton. Two figures were substituted for one, and the unmistakable name of Will Shakebag was cut in half and divided between them. Care had moreover been taken to disguise the person by altering the complexion of the individual aimed at. That the actual Shakespeare was a fair man they had the evidence of the coloured bust at Stratford. Could any capable and fair-minded man—he would appeal to their justly honoured Founder—require further evidence as to the original of Black Will Shakebag? Another important character in the play was Black Will's accomplice and Arden's servant—Michael, after whom the play had also at one time been called *Murderous Michael*. The single fact that Shakespeare and Drayton were both of them Warwickshire men would suffice, he could not doubt, to carry conviction with it to the mind of every member present, with regard to the original of this personage. It now only remained for him to produce the name of the real author of this play. He would do so at once—Ben Jonson. About the time of its production Jonson was notoriously engaged in writing those additions to *The Spanish Tragedy* of which a preposterous attempt had been made to deprive him on the paltry ground that the style (forsooth) of these additional scenes was very like the style of Shakespeare and utterly unlike the style of Jonson. To dispose for ever of this pitiful argument it would be sufficient to mention the names of its two first and principal supporters—Charles Lamb and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (hisses and laughter). Now, in these 'adycions to Jeronimo' a painter was introduced complaining of the murder of his son. In the play before them a painter was introduced as an accomplice in the murder of Arden. It was unnecessary to dwell upon so trivial a point of difference as that between the stage employment or the moral character of the one artist and the other. In either case they were as closely as possible connected with a murder. There was a painter in *The Spanish Tragedy*, and

there was also a painter in *Arden of Faversham*. He need not—he would not add another word in confirmation of the now established fact, that Ben Jonson had in this play held up to perpetual infamy—whether deserved or undeserved he would not pretend to say—the names of two poets who afterwards became his friends, but whom he had previously gibbeted or at least pilloried in public as Black Will Shakespeare and Murderous Michael Drayton.

Mr. E. then brought forward a subject of singular interest and importance—'The lameness of Shakespeare—was it moral or physical?' He would not insult their intelligence by dwelling on the absurd and exploded hypothesis that this expression was allegorical, but would at once assume that the infirmity in question was physical. Then arose the question—In which leg? He was prepared, on the evidence of an early play, to prove to demonstration that the injured and interesting limb was the left. 'This shoe is my father,' says Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*; 'no, this left shoe is my father; no, no, this left shoe is my mother; nay, that cannot be so neither; yes, it is so, it is so; *it hath the worser sole.*' This passage was not necessary either to the progress of the play or to the development of the character; he believed he was justified in asserting that it was not borrowed from the original novel on which the play was founded; the inference was obvious, that without some personal allusion it must have been as unintelligible to the audience as it had hitherto been to the commentators. His conjecture was confirmed, and the whole subject illustrated with a new light, by the well-known line in one of the Sonnets, in which the poet describes himself as 'made lame by Fortune's dearest spite': a line of which the inner meaning and personal application had also by a remarkable chance been reserved for him (Mr. E.) to discover. There could be no doubt that we had here a clue to the origin of the physical infirmity referred to; an accident which must have befallen Shakespeare in early life while acting at the Fortune theatre, and consequently before his connection with a rival company; a fact of grave importance till now unverified. The epithet 'dearest,'

like so much else in the Sonnets, was evidently susceptible of a double interpretation. The first and most natural explanation of the term would at once suggest itself ; the play-house would of necessity be dearest to the actor dependent on it for subsistence, as the means of getting his bread ; but he thought it not unreasonable to infer from this unmistakable allusion that the entrance fee charged at the Fortune may probably have been higher than the price of seats in any other house. Whether or not this fact, taken in conjunction with the accident already mentioned, should be assumed as the immediate cause of Shakespeare's subsequent change of service, he was not prepared to pronounce with such positive confidence as they might naturally expect from a member of the Society ; but he would take upon himself to affirm that his main thesis was now and for ever established on the most irrefragable evidence, and that no assailant could by any possibility dislodge by so much as a hair's breadth the least fragment of a single brick in the impregnable structure of proof raised by the argument to which they had just listened.

This demonstration being thus satisfactorily concluded, Mr. F. proceeded to read his paper on the date of *Othello*, and on the various parts of that play respectively assignable to Samuel Rowley, to George Wilkins, and to Robert Daborne. It was evident that the story of Othello and Desdemona was originally quite distinct from that part of the play in which Iago was a leading figure. This he was prepared to show at some length by means of the weak-ending test, the light-ending test, the double-ending test, the triple-ending test, the heavy-monosyllabic-eleventh-syllable-of-the-double-ending test, the run-on-line test, and the central-pause test. Of the partnership of other poets in the play he was able to adduce a simpler but not less cogent proof. A member of their Committee said to an objector lately : ' To me, there are the handwritings of four different men, the thoughts and powers of four different men, in the play. If you can't see them now, you must wait till, by study, you can. I can't give you eyes.' To this argument he (Mr. F.) felt that it would be an insult to their understandings if he should attempt to add another word.

Still, for those who were willing to try and learn, and educate their ears and eyes, he had prepared six tabulated statements—

(At this important point of a most interesting paper, our reporter unhappily became unconscious, and remained for some considerable period in a state of deathlike stupor. On recovering from this total and unaccountable suspension of all his faculties, he found the speaker drawing gradually near the end of his figures, and so far succeeded in shaking off the sense of coma as to be able to resume his notes.)

That the first and fourth scenes of the third act were not by the same hand as the third scene he should have no difficulty in proving to the satisfaction of all capable and fair-minded men. In the first and fourth scenes the word 'virtuous' was used as a dissyllable; in the third it was used as a trisyllable.

'Is, that she will to virtuous Desdemona?'—iii. 1.

'Where virtue is, these are more virtuous.'—iii. 3.

'That by your virtuous means I may again.'—iii. 4.

In the third scene he would also point out the great number of triple endings which had originally led the able editor of Euclid's Elements of Geometry to attribute the authorship of this scene to Shirley: *Cassio* (twice), *patience*, *Cassio* (again), *discretion*, *Cassio* (again), *honesty*, *Cassio* (again), *jealousy*, *jealous* (used as a trisyllable in the verse of Shakespeare's time), *company* (two consecutive lines with the triple ending), *Cassio* (again), *conscience*, *petition*, *ability*, *importunity*, *conversation*, *marriage*, *dungeon*, *mandragora*, *passion*, *monstrous*, *conclusion*, *bounteous*. He could not imagine any man in his senses questioning the weight of this evidence. Now, let them take the rhymed speeches of the Duke and Brabantio in Act i. Sc. 3, and compare them with the speech of Othello in Act iv. Sc. 2—

Had it pleased heaven
To try me with affliction.

He appealed to any expert whether this was not in Shakespeare's easy fourth budding manner, with, too, various other points already touched on. On the other hand, take the opening of Brabantio's speech—

So let the Turk of Cyprus us beguile;
We lose it not so long as we can smile.

That, he said, was in Shakespeare's difficult second flowering manner—the style of the later part of the earlier stage of Shakespeare's rhetorical first period but one. It was no more possible to move the one passage up to the date of the other than to invert the order of the alphabet. Here, then, putting aside for the moment the part of the play supplied by Shakespeare's assistants in the last three acts—miserably weak some of it was—they were able to disentangle the early love-play from the later work in which Iago was principally concerned. There was at least fifteen years' growth between them, the steps of which could be traced in the poet's intermediate plays by any one who chose to work carefully enough at them. Set any of the speeches addressed in the Shakespeare part of the last act by Othello to Desdemona beside the consolatory address of the Duke to Brabantio, and see the difference of the rhetoric and style in the two. If they turned to characters, Othello and Desdemona were even more clearly the companion pair to Biron and Rosaline of *Love's Labour's Lost* than were Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet the match-pair (*sic*) of Romeo and Juliet. In *Love's Labour's Lost* the question of complexion was identical, though the parts were reversed. He would cite but a few parallel passages in evidence of this relationship between the subjects of the two plays :—

Love's Labour's Lost, iv. 3.

1. 'By heaven, thy love is black
as ebony.'
2. 'No face is *fair* that is not full
so black.'
3. 'O paradox ! Black is the
badge of hell.'
4. 'O, if in black my lady's
brows be decked.'
5. 'And therefore is she born
to make black fair.'
6. 'Paints itself black to imitate
her brow.'
7. 'To look like her are *chimney-sweepers* black.'

Othello.

1. 'An old black ram.'—i. 1.
2. 'Your son-in-law is far more
fair than black.'—i. 3.
3. 'How if she be black and
witty ?'—ii. 1.
4. 'If she be black, and thereto
have a wit.'—*id.*
5. 'A measure to the health of
black Othello.'—ii. 3.
6. 'For I am black.'—iii. 3.
7. 'Begrimed and black.'—*id.*

Now, with these parallel passages before them, what man, woman, or child could bring himself or herself to believe that the connection of these plays was casual or the date of the first *Othello* removable from the date of the early contemporary late-first-period-but-one play *Love's Labour's Lost*, or that anybody's opinion that they were so was worth one straw? When therefore by the introduction of the Iago episode Shakespeare in his later days had with the assistance of three fellow-poets completed the unfinished work of his youth, the junction thus effected of the Brabantio part of the play with this Iago underplot supplied them with an evidence wholly distinct from that of the metrical test which yet confirmed in every point the conclusion independently arrived at and supported by the irresistible coincidence of all the tests. He defied anybody to accept his principle of study or adopt his method of work, and arrive at a different conclusion from himself.

The reading of Mr. G.'s paper on the authorship of the soliloquies in *Hamlet* was unavoidably postponed till the next meeting, the learned member having only time on this occasion to give a brief summary of the points he was prepared to establish and the grounds on which he was prepared to establish them. A year or two since, when he first thought of starting the present Society, he had never read a line of the play in question, having always understood it to be admittedly spurious: but on being assured of the contrary by one of the two foremost poets of the English-speaking world, who was good enough to read out to him in proof of this assertion all that part of the play which could reasonably be assigned to Shakespeare, he had of course at once surrendered his own former opinion, well grounded as it had hitherto seemed to be on the most solid of all possible foundations. At their next meeting he would show cause for attributing to Ben Jonson not only the soliloquies usually but inconsiderately quoted as Shakespeare's, but the entire original conception of the character of the Prince of Denmark. The resemblance of this character to that of Volpone in *The Fox* and to that of Face in *The Alchemist* could not possibly escape the notice of the most cursory reader. The principle of disguise was

the same in each case, whether the end in view were simply personal profit, or (as in the case of Hamlet) personal profit combined with revenge; and whether the disguise assumed was that of madness, of sickness, or of a foreign personality, the assumption of character was in all three cases identical. As to style, he was only too anxious to meet (and, he doubted not, to beat) on his own ground any antagonist whose ear had begotten¹ the crude and untenable theory that the Hamlet soliloquies were not distinctly within the range of the man who could produce those of Crites and of Macilente in *Cynthia's Revels* and *Every Man out of his Humour*. The author of those soliloquies could, and did, in the parallel passages of *Hamlet*, rise near the height of the master he honoured and loved.

The further discussion of this subject was reserved for the next meeting of the Society, as was also the reading of Mr. H.'s paper on the subsequent quarrel between the two joint authors of *Hamlet*, which led to Jonson's caricature of Shakespeare (then retired from London society to a country life of solitude) under the name of Morose, and to Shakespeare's retort on Jonson, who was no less evidently attacked under the designation of Ariel. The allusions to the subject of Shakespeare's sonnets in the courtship and marriage of Epicœne by Morose were as obvious as the allusions in the part of Ariel to the repeated incarceration of Jonson, first on a criminal and secondly on a political charge, and to his probable release in the former case (during the reign of Elizabeth=Sycorax) at the intercession of Shakespeare, who was allowed on all hands to have represented himself in the character of Prospero ('it was mine art that let thee out'). Mr. I. would afterwards read a paper on the evidence for Shakespeare's whole or part authorship of a dozen or so of the least known plays of his time, which, besides having various words and phrases in

¹ When the learned member made use of this remarkable phrase he probably had in his mind the suggestive query of Agnès, *si les enfants qu'on fait se faisaient par l'oreille?* But the flower of rhetoric here gathered was beyond the reach of Arnolphe's innocent ward. 'The procreation in such a case is even more difficult for fancy to realise than the conception.'

common with his acknowledged works, were obviously too bad to be attributed to any other known writer of the period. Eminent among these was the tragedy of *Andromana, or the Merchant's Wife*, long since rejected from the list of Shirley's works as unworthy of that poet's hand. Unquestionably it was so; not less unworthy than *A Larum for London* of Marlowe's. The consequent inference that it must needs be the work of the new Shakespeare's was surely no less cogent in this than in the former case. The allusion occurring in it to a play bearing date just twenty-six years after the death of Shakespeare, and written by a poet then unborn, was a strong point in favour of his theory. (This argument was received with general marks of adhesion.) What, he would ask, could be more natural than that Shirley when engaged on the revision and arrangement for the stage of this posthumous work of the new Shakespeare's (a fact which could require no further proof than he had already adduced), should have inserted this reference in order to disguise the name of its real author, and protect it from the disfavour of an audience with whom that name was notoriously out of fashion? This reasoning, conclusive in itself, became even more irresistible—or would become so, if that were anything less than an absolute impossibility—on comparison of parallel passages.

Though kings still hug suspicion in their bosoms,
They hate the causer. (*Andromana*, Act i. Sc. 3.)

Compare this with the avowal put by Shakespeare into the mouth of a king :

Though I did wish him dead
I hate the murderer. (*King Richard II.*, Act v. Sc. 6.)

Again in the same scene :

For then her husband comes home from the Rialto.

Compare this with various passages (too familiar to quote) in *The Merchant of Venice*. The transference of the Rialto to Iberia was of a piece with the discovery of a sea-coast in Bohemia. In the same scene Andromana says to her lover,

finding him reluctant to take his leave, almost in the very words of Romeo to Juliet :

Then let us stand and outface danger,
Since you will have it so.

It was obvious that only the author of the one passage could have thought it necessary to disguise his plagiarism in the other by an inversion of sexes between the two speakers. In the same scene were three other indisputable instances of repetition.

Mariners might with far greater ease
Hear whole shoals of sirens singing.

Compare *Comedy of Errors*, Act iii. Scene 2 :

Sing, siren, for thyself.

In this case identity of sex was as palpable an evidence for identity of authorship as diversity of sex had afforded in the preceding instance.

Again :

Have oaths no *more validity* with princes ?

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Act iii. Scene 3, the very same words were coupled in the very same order :

More validity,
More honourable state, more courtship lies
In carrion flies than Romeo.

Again :

It would have killed a salamander.

Compare the *First Part of King Henry IV.*, Act iii. Scene 3 :

I have maintained that salamander of yours with fire any time this two and thirty years.

In Act ii. Scene 2 the hero, on being informed how heavy are the odds against him in the field, answers :

I am glad on 't ; the honour is the greater.

To which his confidant rejoins :

The danger is the greater.

And in the sixth scene of the same act the messenger observes :

I only heard the prince wish

He had fewer by a thousand men.

Could any member doubt that we had here the same hand which gave us the like debate between King Henry and Westmoreland on the eve of Agincourt ? or could any member suppose that in the subsequent remark of the same military confidant, ' I smell a rat, sir,' there was merely a fortuitous coincidence with Hamlet's reflection as he ' whips out his rapier '—in itself a martial proceeding—under similar circumstances to the same effect ?

In the very next scene a captain observes of his own troops,

Methinks such tattered rogues should never conquer :

a touch that could only be due to the pencil which had drawn Falstaff's ragged regiment. In both cases, moreover, it was to be noted that the tattered rogues proved ultimately victorious. But he had—they might hardly believe it, but so it was—even yet stronger and more convincing evidence to offer. It would be remembered that a play called *The Double Falsehood*, formerly attributed to Shakespeare on the authority of Theobald, was now generally supposed to have been in its original form the work of Shirley. What, then, he would ask, could be more natural or more probable than that a play formerly ascribed to Shirley should prove to be the genuine work of Shakespeare ? Common sense, common reason, common logic, all alike and all equally combined to enforce upon every candid judgment this inevitable conclusion. This, however, was nothing in comparison to the final proof which he had yet to lay before them. He need not remind them that in the opinion of their illustrious German teachers, the first men to discover and reveal to his unworthy countrymen the very existence of the new Shakespeare, the authenticity of any play

ascribed to the possibly too prolific pen of that poet was invariably to be determined in the last resort by consideration of its demerits. No English critic, therefore, who felt himself worthy to have been born a German, would venture to question the postulate on which all sound principles of criticism with regard to this subject must infallibly be founded : that, given any play of unknown or doubtful authorship, the worse it was, the likelier was it to be Shakespeare's. (This proposition was received with every sign of unanimous assent.) Now, on this ground he was prepared to maintain that the claims of *Andromana* to their most respectful, their most cordial, their most unhesitating acceptance were absolutely beyond all possibility of parallel. Not *Mucedorus* or *Fair Em*, not *The Birth of Merlin* or *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, could reasonably or fairly be regarded as on the same level of worthlessness with this incomparable production. No mortal man who had survived its perusal could for a moment hesitate to agree that it was the most incredibly, ineffably, inconceivably, unmitigatedly, irredeemably, inexpressibly damnable piece of bad work ever perpetrated by human hand. No mortal critic of the genuine Anglo-German school could therefore hesitate for a moment to agree that in common consistency he was bound to accept it as the possible work of no human hand but the hand of the New Shakespeare.

The Chairman then proceeded to recapitulate the work done and the benefits conferred by the Society during the twelve months which had elapsed since its foundation on that day (April 1st) last year. They had ample reason to congratulate themselves and him on the result. They had established an entirely new kind of criticism, working by entirely new means towards an entirely new end, in honour of an entirely new kind of Shakespeare. They had proved to demonstration and overwhelmed with obloquy the incompetence, the imbecility, the untrustworthiness, the blunders, the forgeries, the inaccuracies, the obliquities, the utter moral and literary worthlessness, of previous students and societies. They had revealed to the world at large the generally prevalent ignorance of Shakespeare and his works which so discreditably

distinguished his countrymen. This they had been enabled to do by the simple process of putting forward various theories, and still more various facts, but all of equally incontrovertible value and relevance, of which no Englishman—he might say, no mortal—outside the Society had ever heard or dreamed till now. They had discovered the one trustworthy and indisputable method, so easy and so simple that it must now seem wonderful it should never have been discovered before, by which to pluck out the heart of the poet's mystery and detect the secret of his touch ; the study of Shakespeare by rule of thumb. Every man, woman, and child born with five fingers on each hand was henceforward better qualified as a critic than any poet or scholar of time past. But it was not, whatever outsiders might pretend to think, exclusively on the verse-test, as it had facetiously been called on account of its total incompatibility with any conceivable scheme of metre or principle of rhythm—it was not exclusively on this precious and unanswerable test that they relied. Within the Society as well as without, the pretensions of those who would acknowledge no other means of deciding on debated questions had been refuted and repelled. What were the other means of investigation and verification in which not less than in the metrical test they were accustomed to put their faith, and by which they doubted not to attain in the future even more remarkable results than their researches had as yet achieved, the debate just concluded, in common with every other for which they ever had met or ever were likely to meet, would amply suffice to show. By such processes as had been applied on this as on all occasions to the text of Shakespeare's works and the traditions of his life, they trusted in a very few years to subvert all theories which had hitherto been held and extirpate all ideas which had hitherto been cherished on the subject : and having thus cleared the ground for his advent, to discover for the admiration of the world, as the name of their Society implied, a New Shakespeare. The first step towards this end must of course be the demolition of the old one ; and he would venture to say they had already made a good beginning in that direction. They had disproved or

they would disprove the claim of Shakespeare to the sole authorship of *Macbeth*, *Julius Cæsar*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*; they had established or they would establish the fact of his partnership in *Locrine*, *Mucedorus*, *The Birth of Merlin*, *Dr. Dodipoll*, and *Sir Giles Goosecap*. They had with them the incomparable critics of Germany; men whose knowledge and judgment on all questions of English literature were as far beyond the reach of their English followers as the freedom and enlightenment enjoyed by the subjects of a military empire were beyond the reach of the citizens of a democratic republic. They had established and affiliated to their own primitive body or church various branch societies or sects, in England and elsewhere, devoted to the pursuit of the same end by the same means and method of study as had just been exemplified in the transactions of the present meeting. Still there remained much to be done; in witness of which he proposed to lay before them at their next meeting, by way of inauguration under a happy omen of their new year's work, the complete body of evidence by means of which he was prepared to demonstrate that some considerable portion, if not the greater part, of the remaining plays hitherto assigned to Shakespeare was due to the collaboration of a contemporary actor and playwright, well known by name, but hitherto insufficiently appreciated: Robert Armin, the author of *A Nest of Ninnies*.

ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS

THE humble but hard-working journeyman of letters who was charged with the honourable duty of reporting the transactions at the last meeting of the Newest Shakespeare Society on the auspicious occasion of its first anniversary, April 1st, has received sundry more or less voluminous communications from various gentlemen whose papers were then read or announced, pointing out with more or less acrimonious commentary the matters on which it seems to them severally that they have cause to complain of imperfection or inaccuracy in his conscientious and painstaking report. Anxious above all things to secure for himself such credit as may be due to the modest merit of scrupulous fidelity, he desires to lay before the public so much of the corrections conveyed in their respective letters of reclamation as may be necessary to complete or to rectify the first draught of their propositions as conveyed in his former summary. On the present occasion, however, he must confine himself to forwarding the rectifications supplied by two of the members who took a leading part in the debate of April 1st.

The necessarily condensed report of Mr. A.'s paper on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may make the reasoning put forward by that gentleman liable to the misconception of a hasty reader. The omission of various qualifying phrases has left his argument without such explanation, his statements without such reservation, as he had been careful to supply. He did not say in so many words that he had been disposed to assign this drama to the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy* simply on the score of the affinity discernible between the subjects of the two plays. He is not prone to self-confidence or to indulgence in paradox. What he did say was undeniable by any but those who trusted only to their ear, and refused to correct the conclusions thus arrived at by the help of other

organs which God had given them—their fingers, for example, and their toes ; by means of which a critic of trained and competent scholarship might with the utmost confidence count up as far as twenty, to the great profit of all students who were willing to accept his guidance and be bound by his decision on matters of art and poetry. Only the most purblind could fail to observe, what only the most perverse could hesitate to admit, that there was at first sight an obvious connection between the poison-flower—‘purple from love’s wound’—squeezed by Oberon into the eyes of the sleeping Titania and the poison rubbed by Vindice upon the skull of the murdered Gloriana. No student of Ulrici’s invaluable work would think this a far-fetched reference. That eminent critic had verified the meaning and detected the allusion underlying many a passage of Shakespeare in which the connection of moral idea was more difficult to establish than this. In the fifth act of either play there was a masque or dramatic show of a sanguinary kind ; in the one case the bloodshed was turned to merry-making, in the other the merry-making was turned to bloodshed. Oberon’s phrase, ‘till I torment thee for this injury,’ might easily be mistaken for a quotation from the part of Vindice. This explanation, he trusted, would suffice to exonerate his original view from any charge of haste or rashness ; especially as he had now completely given it up, and adopted one (if possible) more impregnably based on internal and external evidence.

Mr. C. was not unnaturally surprised and indignant to find his position as to Romeo and Lord Burghley barely indicated, and the notice given of the arguments by which it was supported so docked and curtailed as to convey a most inadequate conception of their force. Among the chief points of his argument were these : that the forsaken Rosaline was evidently intended for the late Queen Mary, during whose reign Cecil had notoriously conformed to the observances of her creed, though ready on the accession of Elizabeth to throw it overboard at a day’s notice (it was not to be overlooked that the friar on first hearing the announcement of this change of faith is made earnestly to remonstrate, prefacing his reproaches with an

invocation of two sacred names—an invocation peculiar to Catholics); that the resemblance between old Capulet and Henry VIII. is obvious to the most careless reader; his oath of 'God's bread!' immediately followed by the avowal 'it makes me mad' is an unmistakable allusion to the passions excited by the eucharistic controversy; his violence towards Juliet at the end of the third act at once suggests the alienation of her father's heart from the daughter of Anne Boleyn; the self-congratulation on her own 'stainless' condition as a virgin expressed by Juliet in soliloquy (Act iii. Sc. 2) while in the act of awaiting her bridegroom conveys a furtive stroke of satire at the similar vaunt of Elizabeth when likewise meditating marriage and preparing to receive a suitor from the hostile house of Valois. It must be unnecessary to point out the resemblance or rather the identity between the character and fortune of Paris and the character and fortune of Essex, whose fate had been foreseen and whose end prefigured by the poet with almost prophetic sagacity. To the far-reaching eye of Shakespeare it must have seemed natural and inevitable that Paris (Essex) should fall by the hand of Romeo (Burghley) immediately before the monument of the Capulets where their common mistress was interred alive—immediately, that is, before the termination of the Tudor dynasty in the person of Elizabeth, who towards the close of her reign may fitly have been regarded as one already buried with her fathers, though yet living in a state of suspended animation under the influence of a deadly narcotic potion administered by the friends of Romeo—by the partisans, that is, of the Cecilian policy. The Nurse was not less evidently designed to represent the Established Church. Allusions to the marriage of the clergy are profusely scattered through her speeches. Her deceased husband was probably meant for Sir Thomas More—'a merry man' to the last moment of his existence—who might well be supposed by a slight poetic license to have foreseen in the infancy of Elizabeth her future backsliding and fall from the straight path 'when she came to age.' The passing expression of tenderness with which the Nurse refers to his memory—'God be with his soul!'

implies at once the respect in which the name of the martyr Chancellor was still generally held, and the lingering remains of Catholic tradition which still made a prayer for the dead rise naturally to Anglican lips. On the other hand, the strife between Anglicans and Puritans, the struggle of episcopalian with Calvinistic reformers, was quite as plainly typified in the quarrel between the Nurse and Mercutio, in which the Martin Marprelate controversy was first unmistakably represented on the stage. The 'saucy merchant, that was so full of his ropery,' with his ridicule of the 'stale' practice of Lenten fasting and abstinence, his contempt for 'a Lenten pie,' and his preference for a flesh diet as 'very good meat in Lent,' is clearly a disciple of Calvin; and the impotence of the Nurse, however scandalised at the nakedness of his ribald profanity, to protect herself against it by appeal to reason or tradition, is dwelt upon with an emphasis sufficient to indicate the secret tendency of the poet's own sympathies and convictions. In Romeo's attempt at conciliation, and his poor excuse for Mercutio (which yet the Nurse, an emblem of the temporising and accommodating pliancy of episcopalian Protestantism, shows herself only too ready to accept as valid) as 'one that God hath made, for himself to mar'—the allusion here is evidently to the democratic and revolutionary tendencies of the doctrine of Knox and Calvin, with its ultimate developments of individualism and private judgment—we recognise the note of Burghley's lifelong policy and its endeavour to fuse the Protestant or Puritan party with the state Church of the Tudors as by law established. The distaste of Elizabeth's bishops for such advances, their flutter of apprehension at the daring and their burst of indignation at the insolence of the Calvinists, are significantly expressed in terms which seem to hint at a possible return for help and protection to the shelter of the older faith and the support of its partisans. 'An 'a speak anything against me, I'll take him down an 'a were lustier than he is, and twenty such Jacks' (the allusion here is again obvious, to the baptismal name of John Calvin and John Knox, if not also to the popular byword of Jack Presbyter); 'and if I cannot' (here the sense of insecurity and

dependence on foreign help or secular power becomes transparent), 'I'll find those that shall.' She disclaims communion with the Protestant Churches of the continent, with Amsterdam or Geneva : ' I am none of his flirt-gills ; I am none of his skains-mates.' Peter, who carries her fan (' to hide her face : for her fan's the fairer face ') ; we may take this to be a symbol of the form of episcopal consecration still retained in the Anglican Church as a cover for its separation from Catholicism), is undoubtedly meant for Whitgift, Archbishop of Canterbury ; the name Peter, as applied to a menial who will stand by and suffer every knave to use the Church at his pleasure, but is ready to draw as soon as another man if only he may be sure of having the secular arm of the law on his side, implies a bitter sarcasm on the intruding official of state then established by law as occupant of a see divorced from its connection with that of the apostle. The sense of instability natural to an institution which is compelled to rely for support on ministers who are themselves dependent on the state whose pay they draw for power to strike a blow in self-defence could hardly be better expressed than by the solemn and piteous, almost agonised asseveration : ' Now, afore God, I am so vexed, that every part about me quivers.' To Shakespeare, it cannot be doubted, the impending dissolution or dislocation of the Anglican system in ' every part ' by civil war and religious discord must even then have been but too ominously evident.

If further confirmation could be needed of the underlying significance of allusion traceable throughout this play, it might amply be supplied by fresh reference to the first scene in which the Nurse makes her appearance on the stage, and is checked by Lady Capulet in the full tide of affectionate regret for her lost husband. We can well imagine Anne Boleyn cutting short the regrets of some indiscreet courtier for Sir Thomas More in the very words of the text :

Enough of this ; I pray thee, hold thy peace.

The ' parlous knock ' which left so big a lump upon the brow of the infant Juliet is evidently an allusion to the declaration of Elizabeth's illegitimacy while yet in her cradle. The

seal of bastardy set upon the baby brow of Anne Boleyn's daughter may well be said to have 'broken' it.

The counsel of the Nurse to Juliet in Act iii. Scene 5 to forsake Romeo for Paris indicates the bias of the hierarchy in favour of Essex—'a lovely gentleman'—rather than of the ultra-Protestant policy of Burghley, who doubtless in the eyes of courtiers and churchmen was 'a dish-clout to him.'

These were a few of the points, set down at random, which he had been enabled to verify within the limits of a single play. They would suffice to give an idea of the process by which, when applied in detail to every one of Shakespeare's plays, he trusted to establish the secret history and import of each, not less than the general sequence and significance of all. Further instalments of this work would probably be issued in the forthcoming or future Transactions of the Newest Shakespeare Society; and it was confidently expected that the final monument of his research, when thoroughly completed and illustrated by copious appendices, would prove as worthy as any work of mere English scholarship could hope to be of a place beside the inestimable commentaries of Gervinus, Ulrici, and the Polypseudocriticopantodapomorosophisticometricoglossematographicomaniacal Company for the Confusion of Shakespeare and Diffusion of Verbiage (Unlimited).

CHIMERA BOMBINANS IN VACUO.

NOTE

MINDFUL of the good old analogue regarding 'the squeak of the real pig,' I think it here worth while to certify the reader of little faith, that the more incredibly impudent absurdities above cited are not so much or so often the freaks of parody or the fancies of burlesque as select excerpts and transcripts of printed and published utterances from the 'pink soft litter' of a living brood—from the reports of an actual Society, issued in an abridged and doubtless an emasculated form through

the columns of a weekly newspaper. One final and unapproachable instance, one transcendent and pyramidal example of classical taste and of critical scholarship, I did not venture to impair by transference from those columns and transplantation into these pages among humbler specimens of minor monstrosity. Let it stand here once more on record as 'a good jest for ever'—or rather as the best and therefore as the worst, as the worst and therefore as the best, of all possible bad jests ever to be cracked between this and the crack of doom. Sophocles, said a learned member, was the proper parallel to Shakespeare among the ancient tragedians : *Æschylus—hear, O heaven, and give ear, O earth!*—*Æschylus was only a Marlowe.*

The hand which here transcribes this most transcendent utterance has written before now many lines in verse and in prose to the honour and glory of Christopher Marlowe : it has never—be the humble avowal thus blushingly recorded—it has never set down as the writer's opinion that he was only an *Æschylus*. In other words, it has never registered as my deliberate and judicial verdict the finding that he was only the equal of the greatest among all tragic and all prophetic poets ; of the man who combined all the light of the Greeks with all the fire of the Hebrews ; who varied at his will the revelation of the single gift of Isaiah with the display of the mightiest among the manifold gifts of Shakespeare.

FOUR PLAYS

*PERICLES, KING LEAR, OTHELLO, AND
KING RICHARD III.*

PERICLES

THE apocryphal works of Shakespeare are even more various in value than the apocryphal books of the Bible. There is hardly as much difference between the sublime *Wisdom of Solomon* and the nursery tale of *Bel and the Dragon* as between the glorious torso of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and the abject futility of *Mucedorus* or *Locrine*. There are two plays, and only two, of which we may be as absolutely certain that Shakespeare wrote the nobler part as that Shakespeare did not write the whole. The one is taken from *The Knight's Tale*, of Chaucer, the other from an episode in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. In the one case the unfinished work of Shakespeare was completed by the feebler and yet the accomplished and the dexterous hand of a lesser and yet a great dramatic poet ; in the other case the hand of Shakespeare touched and transfigured, recreated and recast, the work of an obscure precursor whose sketch he did not always give himself the trouble to correct and repaint, but chose rather now and then to leave as it stood in the rough, with an incongruous touch of unseasonable splendour flung in or thrown on here and there. It is not easy to say exactly where the work of revision or interpolation begins or ends. We may be misled and dazzled into misjudgment and injustice by the beauty of single lines or short passages, which on reconsideration may not seem so far superior as at first they seemed to the not always unworthy context. There is true poetic dignity throughout in the part of Pericles ; and the fitfully frequent relapses into rhyme

which help to make the style of the earlier scenes seem cruder and more juvenile than that of the last three acts are merely, it may be, signs of haste and indifference rather than of inferiority and illegitimacy. The scene with the fishermen is at once like Shakespeare and like Heywood ; either of the two might have written it. No one who knows the lesser poet will deny this ; and no one can fail to see how this explains the curious and at first sight startling collocation of his name and of Dekker's with the name that is above every name in the famous passage which places on record the wish of Shakespeare's greatest disciple that what he wrote should be read by their light.

All the second act, be the text canonical or apocryphal, must evidently have been written at full gallop of the pen. The good Simonides is the sort of monarch who figures in the fables of the *Gesta Romanorum* and other delightful compilations of mediæval mythology and mediæval morality as the allegorical representative of Christ or antichrist, God or the devil. He plays the most childish tricks, and accomplishes the most burlesque antics that can ever have enraptured an adult infant in the process of a serious pantomime. However, it must be set down to his credit that he winds up and makes an end of the apocryphal part of the play. After he vanishes we are at home for good in the divine and human company of Shakespeare.

When the storm breaks upon us with the opening of the third act, we know where we are. We are in the very heaven of heavens to which none can be admitted save by the grace of the greatest among poets. We are at sea, συντετάρακται δ' αἰθήρ πόντῳ. Æschylus the father and Shakespeare the son are revealed as one god in the sight of all men not too impotent to perceive and too abject to adore ; for the divine humanity of Shakespeare

is as great as even the superhuman sublimity of Æschylus. The matchless loveliness of lightning and the matchless music of thunder give here the signal, not of war with a deathless and a more than godlike enemy of an evil and omnipotent God, but of war against a woman in travail and her newborn child. The pity of it is as great and as terrible as the terror. Every verse rings and clings in the ear for ever. 'These surges that wash both heaven and hell' give such immortal echo to the transitory harmonies of an actual storm at sea as no man but one could have translated or transfigured into articulate utterance. There is no more splendid poetry in *Othello* or *King Lear* than Shakespeare's magnificent prodigality has lavished on the lament of Pericles over Thaisa ; or a passage in a play which he cannot have taken as seriously as all readers may see that he must have taken such masterpieces of his own creation as those which he remoulded and rewrote from end to end. The three succeeding scenes are perfect Shakespeare in metre and in style. Short and simple as they are, they are cast in the mould of speech which no student can fail to recognise, and informed with the breath of music which no disciple has ever caught the tune of for more than a wonderful moment. Webster himself, the greatest as the most faithful of them all, was never so like him for so long.

In the fourth act of *Pericles* the most exquisite sweetness of Shakespearean poetry and the most desperate fidelity of Shakespearean realism are interchangeably relieved and set off against each other with a daring, a tact, and a success, all equally incomparable. There is no scene of more living loveliness than the first scene of this act in *The Winter's Tale*, or *Cymbeline*, or *The Tempest*. Not one among Shakespeare's women makes the entrance on his stage with a more wonderful charm

about her than does Marina. Her flowers, her tears, the fond fidelity and simplicity of tenderness in mourning, win us as instantly and as thoroughly as we are won by the first appearance of her sisters Perdita and Miranda. There is hardly anything in Shakespeare more wonderfully and beautifully lifelike than her innocent tour with the intending assassin when they are left together by the shore. The sweetness and freshness of meadowland and sea which breathe upon the spirit as we read enhance the tragic effect of terror and intensify the sense of noisome horror in the sudden transference of scene and transformation of atmosphere from the fairest to the foulest upon earth. The poetry of this famous and ill-famed fourth act is not more unmistakably Shakespearean than the prose. Malone, scholar and critic, worth many a German generation of rhapsodists and scholiasts, has a note on a passage in the first of the two scenes in the temple of Priapus which should suffice to establish his credit as a commentator :

If there were no other proof of this piece having been written by Shakespeare, this admirable stroke of humour would, in my apprehension, stamp it as his.

I say ditto to Mr. Malone—as did a contemporary of his in parliament to the most illustrious of their countrymen. It is surely no small distinction, no small addition to the spiritual or intellectual honours of Ireland, that the two best and finest critics of Shakespeare as a poetic humourist should have been Irishmen—Maurice Morgan and Edmund Malone. The eighteenth century did indeed produce a more deeply and thoroughly appreciative panegyrist of Shakespeare than either of these ; but he was neither an Englishman, an Irishman, nor a Scotchman. I wish it could be said that he was a respectable Frenchman, but the sad and comic truth

is that he was a no less disreputable writer than Rétif de la Bretonne, pornographer of Paris. The pretty little chapter of chatter about Hamlet in *Wilhelm Meister* is as a schoolboy's prize exercise or an undergraduate's prize essay to the letter on Shakespeare in *Le Paysan Perverti*. Rétif, the prophet who made public declaration of his belief that things could not last as they were for twenty years longer just fourteen years before the sunrise of the French Revolution, was the first critic to see and to affirm the fact that the objections brought by French criticism against the art of Shakespeare were evidences to the fact that Shakespeare's way of work was not the wrong way but the right ; that the union of tragic and comic emotion on the same stage in the same scene was no more a matter for apology than a subject for derision ; that it was the final and crowning proof how far above all docile and servile tragedians after the order of Racine and Voltaire was the greatest of all men who ever had written for the stage. The wide and deep critical insight of the man is not more admirably exceptional than the moral courage which was needed to affirm his conviction of this truth under the spiritual reign of King Voltaire.

That any doubt should ever have been cast upon the authorship of the scenes in which the heroic purity of Marina is tried and tested as by fire is a memorable piece of evidence that the Shakespearean criticism of the nineteenth century was by no means always superior or never inferior to that of the eighteenth. The unsavoury atmosphere is not denser in the Mytilene of *Pericles* than the air we breathe in Vienna of *Measure for Measure*. Pompey and his mistress, whose very names are unclean, are certainly no decenter creatures than Boult and his employers. In *Troilus and Cressida*

there are far loathsomer passages, far noisomer allusions and expressions, than can be found anywhere in Shakespeare outside the marvellously horrible and magnificently hideous part of *Thersites*. The author of these two canonical plays was certainly not too prudish or squeamish to have written the certainly not more offensive passages which have offended modern readers in the apocryphal play of *Pericles*. And who else could have written them? There is nothing of equal æsthetic or literary excellence in the realistic improprieties or indecencies of those other two. Somebody somewhere once suggested that they might have been written by William Rowley. Why not by Edward Sharpham? There are scenes as unsavoury and unseemly to the sight and taste of modern readers or playgoers in other plays by other poets and dramatists of the time not unworthy to serve as lieutenants or ensigns under the command of Shakespeare. Where are there such strokes of profound and sublime humour, of passionate and living truth?

The romantic and pathetic beauty of the last act is no more out of keeping with the rest of the play than is the conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*. One only among the greatest of all poets could have imagined anything so lovely and made it so sublime. The mere romance of it has a charm which none but Shakespeare could have given to the simple old story of accidental adventure and supernatural commonplace; but the natural intensity of emotion rather transfused than translated into perfect speech raises it high above the level of mere mediæval romance, and proves that there is less difference of poetic rank between Chaucer and Gower than between Shakespeare and Chaucer. In all earlier English poetry there is nothing so tender as the interview of the shattered father with his restored child.

And there is no falling off in what follows, even to the end. And no praise could be higher than this.

The moral or spiritual charm of Shakespeare's work is as nearly indefinable as it is incomparable. There are touches or strokes of something like it now and then in Homer and the Hebrews, but they flash across the text and pass away. Divine atrocity and human savagery combine to efface the impression of moral beauty which even in the work of Æschylus and of Sophocles is less perfect and less final than in the unapproachable work of Shakespeare.

KING LEAR

IF nothing were left of Shakespeare but the single tragedy of *King Lear*, it would still be as plain as it is now that he was the greatest man that ever lived. As a poet, the author of this play can only be compared with Æschylus : the Hebrew prophets and the creator of Job are sometimes as sublime in imagination and in passion, but always quite incomparably inferior in imaginative intelligence. Sophocles is as noble, as beautiful, and as kindly a thinker and a writer : but the gentle Shakespeare could see farther and higher and wider and deeper at a glance than ever could the gentle Sophocles. Aristophanes had as magnificent a power of infinitely joyous wit and infinitely inexhaustible humour : but whom can he show us or offer us to be set against Falstaff or the Fool ? It is true that Shakespeare has neither the lyric nor the prophetic power of the Greeks and the Hebrews : but then it must be observed and remembered that he, and he alone among poets and among men, could well afford to dispense even with such transcendent gifts as these. Freedom of thought and sublimity of utterance came hand in hand together into English speech : our first great poet, if loftiness and splendour of spirit and of word be taken as the test of greatness, was Christopher Marlowe. From his dead hand the one man born to excel him, and to pay a due and a deathless tribute to his deathless memory, took up the heritage of dauntless thought, of daring imagination, and of since unequalled song.

The tragedy of *King Lear*, like the trilogy of the Oresteia, is a thing incomparable and unique. To compare it with *Othello* is as inevitable a temptation as to compare the *Agamemnon* with the *Prometheus* of the one man comparable with Shakespeare. And the result, for any reader of human intelligence and decent humility in sight of what is highest in the spiritual world, must always be a sense of adoring doubt and exulting hesitation. In *Othello* and in *Prometheus* a single figure, an everlasting and godlike type of heroic and human agony, dominates and dwarfs all others but those of the traitor Iago and the tyrant God. There is no Clytaemnestra in the one, and there is no Cordelia in the other. ‘The gentle lady married to the Moor’ is too gentle for comparison with the most glorious type of womanhood which even Shakespeare ever created before he conceived and brought forth Imogen. No one could have offered to Cordelia the tribute of so equivocal a compliment as was provoked by the submissive endurance of Desdemona—‘Truly, an obedient lady.’ Antigone herself—and with Antigone alone can we imagine the meeting of Cordelia in the heaven of heavens—is not so divinely human as Cordelia. We love her all the more, with a love that at once tempers and heightens our worship, for the rough and abrupt repetition of her nobly unmerciful reply to her father’s fond and fatuous appeal. Almost cruel and assuredly severe in its uncompromising self-respect, this brief and natural word of indignantly reticent response is the key-note of all that follows—the spark which kindles into eternal life the most tragic of all tragedies in the world. All the yet unimaginable horror of the future becomes at once inevitable and assured when she shows herself so young and so untender—so young and true. And

what is the hereditary horror of doom once imminent over the house of Atreus to this instant imminence of no supernatural but a more awfully natural fate? Cursed and cast out, she leaves him and knows that she leaves him in the hands of Goneril and Regan.

Coleridge, the greatest though not the first great critic and apostle or interpreter of Shakespeare, has noted 'these daughters and these sisters' as the only characters in Shakespeare whose wickedness is ultranatural—something outside and beyond the presumable limits of human evil. It would be well for human nature if it were so; but is it? They are 'remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless'; hot and hard, cold and cunning, savage and subtle as a beast of the field or the wilderness or the jungle. But such dangerous and vicious animals are not more exceptional than the very noblest and purest of their kind. An Iago is abnormal: his wonderful intelligence, omnipotent and infallible within its limit and its range, gives to the unclean and maleficent beast that he is the dignity and the mystery of a devil. Goneril and Regan would be almost vulgarly commonplace by comparison with him if the conditions of their life and the circumstances of their story were not so much more extraordinary than their instincts and their acts. 'Regan,' according to Coleridge, 'is not, in fact, a greater monster than Goneril, but she has the power of casting more venom.' A champion who might plead that Regan was so much more of a Gadarean sow than her elder sister as to be, for all we know, incapable of such passion as flames out in Goneril at the thought of foreign banners spread in a noiseless land.

Where's thy drum ?

France spreads his banners in our noiseless land ;
 With plumed helm thy slayer begins [his] threats ;
 Whiles thou, a moral fool, sit'st still, and criest
 ' Alack, why does he so ? '

Beast and she-devil as she is, she rises in that instant to the level of an unclean and a criminal Joan of Arc. Her advocate might also invoke as an extenuating circumstance the fact that she poisoned Regan.

François-Victor Hugo, the author of the best and fullest commentary ever written on the text of which he gave us the most wonderful and masterly of all imaginable translations, has perhaps unwittingly enforced and amplified the remark of Coleridge on the difference between the criminality of the one man chosen by chance and predestined by nature as the proper paramour of either sister and the monstrosity of the creatures who felt towards him as women feel towards the men they love. Edmund is not a more true-born child of hell than a true-born son of his father. Goneril and Regan are legitimate daughters of the pit ; the man who excites in them such emotion as in such as they are may pass as the substitute for love is but a half-blooded fellow from the infernal as well as the human point of view. His last wish is to undo the last and most monstrous of his crimes. Such a wish would have been impossible to either of the sisters by whom he can boast with his dying breath that Edmund was beloved.

I pant for life : some good I mean to do,
 Despite of mine own nature. Quickly send,
 Be brief in it, to the castle ; for my writ
 Is on the life of Lear and on Cordelia :
 Nay, send in time.

The incomparable genius of the greatest among all poets and all men approved itself incomparable for ever by the possibly unconscious instinct which in this supreme work induced or compelled him to set side by side the very lowest and the very highest types of imaginable humanity. Kent and Oswald, Regan and Cordelia, stand out in such relief against each other that Shakespeare alone could have wrought their several figures into one perfect scheme of spiritual harmony. Setting aside for a moment the reflection that outside the work of Æschylus there is no such poetry in the world, we must remember that there is no such realism. And there is no discord between the supreme sublimities of impassioned poetry and the humblest realities of photographic prose. Incredible and impossible as it seems, the impression of the one is enhanced and intensified by the impression of the other.

That Shakespeare's judgment was as great and almost as wonderful as his genius has been a commonplace of criticism ever since the days of Coleridge ; questionable only by such dirty and dwarfish creatures of simian intellect and facetious idiocy as mistake it for a sign of wit instead of dullness, and of distinction instead of degradation, to deny the sun in heaven and affirm the fragrance of a sewer. But I do not know whether his equally unequalled skill in the selection and composition of material for the construction of a masterpiece has or has not been as all but universally recognised. No more happy and no more terrible inspiration ever glorified the genius of a poet than was that which bade the greatest of them all inweave or fuse together the legend of Lear and his daughters with the story of Gloucester and his sons. It is possible that an episode in Sidney's *Arcadia* may have suggested, as is usually

supposed or usually repeated, the notion or conception of this more than tragic underplot ; but the student will be disappointed who thinks to find in the sweet and sunbright work of Sidney's pure and happy genius a touch or a hint of such tragic horror as could only be conceived and made endurable by the deeper as well as higher, and darker as well as brighter, genius of Shakespeare. And this fearful understudy in terror is a necessary, an indispensable, part of the most wonderful creation ever imagined and realised by man. The author of the Book of Job, the author of the Eumenides, can show nothing to be set beside the third act of *King Lear*. All that is best and all that is worst in man might have been brought together and flashed together upon the mind's eye of the spectator or the student without the intervention of such servile ministers as take part with Goneril and Regan against their father. Storm and lightning, thunder and rain, become to us, even as they became to Lear, no less conscious and responsible partners in the superhuman inhumanity of an unimaginable crime. The close of the *Prometheus* itself seems less spiritually and overpoweringly fearful by comparison with a scene which is not the close and is less terrible than the close of *King Lear*. And it is no whit more terrible than it is beautiful. The splendour of the lightning and the menace of the thunder serve only or mainly to relieve or to enhance the effect of suffering and the potency of passion on the spirit and the conscience of a man. The sufferer is transfigured : but he is not transformed. Mad or sane, living and dying, he is passionate and vehement, single-hearted and self-willed. And therefore it is that the fierce appeal, the fiery protest against the social iniquities and the legal atrocities of civilised mankind, which none before the greatest of all

Englishmen had ever dreamed of daring to utter in song or set forth upon the stage, comes not from Hamlet, but from Lear. The young man whose infinite capacity of thought and whose delicate scrupulosity of conscience at once half disabled and half deified him could never have seen what was revealed by suffering to an old man who had never thought or felt more deeply or more keenly than an average labourer or an average king. Lear's madness, at all events, was assuredly not his enemy, but his friend.

The rule of Elizabeth and her successor may have been more arbitrary than we can now understand how the commonwealth of England could accept and could endure ; but how far it was from a monarchy, from a government really deserving of that odious and ignominious name, we may judge by the fact that this play could be acted and published. Among all its other great qualities, among all the many other attributes which mark it for ever as matchless among the works of man, it has this above all, that it is the first great utterance of a cry from the heights and the depths of the human spirit on behalf of the outcasts of the world —on behalf of the social sufferer, clean or unclean, innocent or criminal, thrall or free. To satisfy the sense of righteousness, the craving for justice, as unknown and unimaginable by Dante as by Chaucer, a change must come upon the social scheme of things which shall make an end of the actual relations between the judge and the cutpurse, the beadle and the prostitute, the beggar and the king. All this could be uttered, could be prophesied, could be thundered from the English stage at the dawn of the seventeenth century. Were it within the power of omnipotence to create a German or a Russian Shakespeare, could anything of the sort be whispered or muttered or hinted

or suggested from the boards of a Russian or a German theatre at the dawn of the twentieth ? When a Tolstoi or a Sudermann can do this, and can do it with impunity in success, it will be allowed that his country is not more than three centuries behind England in civilisation and freedom. Not political reform, but social revolution as beneficent and as bloodless, as absolute and as radical, as enkindled the aspiration and the faith of Victor Hugo, is the key-note of the creed and the watchword of the gospel according to Shakespeare. Not, of course, that it was not his first and last aim to follow the impulse which urged him to do good work for its own sake and for love of his own art : but this he could not do without delivery of the word that was in him—the word of witness against wrong done by oversight as well as by cruelty, by negligence as surely as by crime. These things were hidden from the marvellous wisdom of Hamlet, and revealed to the more marvellous insanity of Lear.

There is nothing of the miraculous in this marvel : the mere presence and companionship of the Fool should suffice to account for it ; Cordelia herself is but a little more adorably worthy of our love than the poor fellow who began to pine away after her going into France and before his coming into sight of reader or spectator. Here again the utmost humiliation imaginable of social state and daily life serves only to exalt and to emphasise the nobility and the manhood of the natural man. The whip itself cannot degrade him ; the threat of it cannot change his attitude towards Lear ; the dread of it cannot modify his defiance of Goneril. Being, if not half-witted, not altogether as other men are, he urges Lear to return and ask his daughters' blessing rather than brave the midnight and the storm : but he cleaves to his master

with the divine instinct of fidelity and love which is not, though it should be, as generally recognised in the actual nature of a cat as in the proverbial nature of a dog. And when the old man is trembling on the very verge of madness, he sees and understands the priceless worth of such devotion and the godlike wisdom of such folly. In the most fearfully pathetic of all poems the most divinely pathetic touch of all is the tender thought of the houseless king for the suffering of such a fellow-sufferer as his fool. The whirlwind of terror and pity in which we are living as we read may at first confuse and obscure to the sight of a boyish reader the supreme significance and the unutterable charm of it. But if any elder does not feel it too keenly and too deeply for tears, it is a pity that he should waste his time and misuse his understanding in the study of Shakespeare.

There is nothing in all poetry so awful, so nearly unendurable by the reader who is compelled by a natural instinct of imagination to realise and believe it, as the close of the *Choephorœ*, except only the close of *King Lear*. The cry of Ugolino to the earth that would not open to swallow and to save is not quite so fearful in its pathos. But the skill which made use of the stupid old chronicle or tradition to produce this final masterpiece of tragedy is coequal with the genius which created it. The legendary Cordelia hanged herself in prison, long after her father's death, when defeated in battle by the sons of Goneril. And this most putid and contemptible tradition suggested to Shakespeare the most dramatic and the most poetic of all scenes and all events that ever bade all men not devoid of understanding understand how much higher is the genius of man than the action of chance : how far the truth of imagination exceeds and transcends

at all points the accident of fact. That an event may have happened means nothing and matters nothing ; that a man such as Æschylus or Shakespeare imagined it means this : that it endures and bears witness what man may be, at the highest of his powers and the noblest of his nature, for ever.

OTHELLO

IN the seventh story of the third decade of the *Hecatommithi* of M. Giovanbattista Giraldi Cinthio, 'nobile Ferrarese,' first published in 1565, there is an incident so beautifully imagined and so beautifully related that it seems at first inexplicable how Shakespeare, when engaged in transfiguring this story into the tragedy of *Othello*, can have struck it out of his version. The loss of the magic handkerchief which seals the doom of the hero and his fellow-victim is far less plausibly and far less beautifully explained by a mere accident, and a most unlikely accident, than by a device which heightens at once the charm of Desdemona and the atrocity of Iago. It is through her tenderness for his little child that he takes occasion to destroy her.

The ancient or ensign, who is nameless as every other actor in the story except the Moor's wife,¹ is of course, if compared with Iago, a mere shadow cast before it by the advent of that awful figure. But none the less is he the remarkably powerful and original creature of a true and tragic genius. Every man may make for himself, and must allow that he cannot pre-

¹ From her name of Disdemona, a curious corruption of the Greek word δισδαλμων, Cinthio, with a curious anticipation of one of the finest and most delightful touches in one of the finest and most delightful characters ever created by the very genius of creative humour, deduces the Shandean moral that her father was the first person blameworthy, for having given her a name of unhappy augury. 'And it was resolved among the company, that the name being the first gift that the father gives his son, he ought to bestow on him one both magnificent and fortunate, as though he wished thus to presage for him good and greatness.'

tend to impose upon any other, his own image of the most wicked man ever created by the will of man or God. But Cinthio's villain is distinctly and vividly set before us : a man 'of most beautiful presence, but of the wickedest nature that ever was man in the world.' Less abnormal and less inhumanly intellectual than Iago, who loved Desdemona 'not out of absolute lust' (perhaps the strangest and subtlest point of all that go to make up his all but inscrutable character), this simpler villain, 'no whit heeding the faith given to his wife, nor friendship, nor faith, nor obligation, that he might have to the Moor, fell most ardently in love with Desdemona. And he set all his thought to see if it might become possible for him to enjoy her.'

This plain and natural motive would probably have sufficed for any of those great contemporaries who found it easier to excel all other tragic or comic poets since the passing of Sophocles and Aristophanes than to equal or draw near to Shakespeare. For him it was insufficient. Neither envy nor hatred nor jealousy nor resentment, all at work together in festering fusion of conscious and contemplative evil, can quite explain Iago even to himself : yet neither Macbeth nor even Hamlet is by nature more inevitably introspective. But the secret of the abyss of this man's nature lies deeper than did ever plummet sound save Shakespeare's. The bright and restless devil of Goethe's invention, the mournfuller and more majestic devil created by Marlowe, are spirits of less deep damnation than that incarnate in the bluff plain-spoken soldier whose honesty is the one obvious thing about him, the one unmistakable quality which neither man nor woman ever fails to recognise and to trust.

And what is even the loftier Faust, whose one fitting mate was Helen, if compared with the subjects of Iago's

fathomless and bottomless malice? This quarry cries on havoc louder than when Hamlet fell. Shakespeare alone could have afforded to cancel the most graceful touch, to efface the loveliest feature, in the sketch of Cinthio's heroine. But Desdemona can dispense with even this.

'The Moor's wife went often, as I have said, to the ancient's wife's house, and abode with her a good part of the day. Whence this man seeing that she sometimes bore about her a handkerchief which he knew that the Moor had given her, the which handkerchief was wrought in Moorish wise most subtly, and was most dear to the lady, and in like wise to the Moor, he bethought him to take it from her secretly, and thence to prepare against her her final ruin. And he having a girl of three years old, which child was much beloved of Desdemona, one day that the hapless lady had gone to stay at the house of this villain, he took the little girl in his arms and gave her to the lady, who took her and gathered her to her breast: this deceiver, who was excellent at sleight of hand, reft from her girdlestead the handkerchief so cunningly that she was no whit aware of it, and departed from her right joyful. Desdemona, knowing not this, went home, and being busied with other thoughts took no heed of the handkerchief. But some days thence, seeking for it and not finding it, she was right fearful lest the Moor should ask it of her, as he was often wont to do.'

No reader of this terribly beautiful passage can fail to ask himself why Shakespeare forbore to make use of it. The substituted incident is as much less probable as it is less tragic. The wife offers to bind the husband's aching forehead with this especially hallowed handkerchief: 'he puts it from him, and it drops,'

unnoticed by either, for Emilia to pick up and reflect, 'I am glad I have found this napkin.'

What can be the explanation of what a dunce who knows better than Shakespeare might call an oversight? There is but one: but it is all-sufficient. In Shakespeare's world as in nature's it is impossible that monsters should propagate: that Iago should beget, or that Goneril or Regan should bring forth. Their children are creatures unimaginable by man. The old chronicles give sons to Goneril who vanquish Cordelia in battle and drive her to suicide in prison: but Shakespeare knew that such a tradition was not less morally and physiologically incongruous than it was poetically and dramatically impossible. And Lear's daughters are not monsters in the proper sense: their unnatural nature is but the sublimation and exaggeration of common evil qualities, unalloyed, untempered, unqualified by any ordinary admixture of anything not ravenously, resolutely, mercilessly selfish. They are devils only by dint of being more utterly and exclusively animals—and animals of a lower and hatefuller type—than usual. But any one less thoroughly intoxicated with the poisonous drug of lifelong power upon all others within reach of his royal hand would have been safe from the convincing and subjugating influence of Goneril and Regan. That is plain enough: but who will be fool enough to imagine that he would have been safe against the more deadly and inevitable influence of Iago?

The most fearful evidence of his spiritual power—for it would have been easy for a more timid nature than his wife's to secure herself beforehand against his physical violence by a warning given betimes to either of his intended victims—was necessarily suppressed by Shakespeare as unfit for dramatic service. Emilia

will not believe Othello's assurance of her husband's complicity in the murder of Desdemona : the ancient's wife in Cinthio's terrible story ' knew all, seeing that her husband would fain have made use of her as an instrument in the lady's death, but she would never assent, and for dread of her husband durst not tell her anything.' This is not more striking and satisfying in a tale than it would have been improper and ineffectual in a tragedy. So utter a prostration of spirit, so helpless an abjection of soul and abdication of conscience under the absolute pressure of sheer terror, would have been too purely dreadful and contemptible a phase of debased nature for Shakespeare to exhibit and to elaborate as he must needs have done throughout the scenes in which Iago's wife must needs have figured : even if they could have been as dramatic, as living, as convincing as those in which the light, unprincipled, untrustworthy, loving, lying, foolish, fearless and devoted woman is made actual and tangible to our imagination as none but Shakespeare could have made her : a little afraid, it may be, of her husband, when she gives him the stolen handkerchief, but utterly dauntless when his murderous hand is lifted against her to silence her witness to the truth.

The crowning mark of difference between such a nature as this and such a nature as that of the mistress for whose sake she lays down her life too late to save her is less obvious even in their last difference of opinion—as to whether there are or are not women who abuse their husbands as Othello charges his wife with abusing him—than in the previous scene when Emilia most naturally and inevitably asks her if he has not just shown himself to be jealous, and she answers :

Who, he ? I think the sun where he was born
Drew all such humours from him.

This would be a most noble stroke of pathos if the speaker were wrong—misled by love into loving error ; but the higher Shakespearean pathos, unequalled and impossible for man to conceive as ever possibly to be equalled by man, consists in the fact that she was right. And the men of Shakespeare's age could see this : they coupled together with equally assured propriety and justice of epithet

Honest Iago and the jealous Moor.

The jealousy of the one and the honesty of the other must stand or fall together. Othello, when overmastered by the agony of the sudden certitude that the devotion of his love has been wasted on a harlot who has laid in ashes the honour and the happiness of his life, may naturally or rather must inevitably so bear himself as to seem jealous in the eyes of all—and they are all who know him—to whom Iago seems the living type of honesty : a bluff, gallant, outspoken fellow, no conjurer and no saint, coarse of speech and cynical of humour, but true and tried as steel : a man to be trusted beyond many a far cleverer and many a more refined companion in peril or in peace. It is the supreme triumph of his superb hypocrisy so to disguise the pride of intellect which is the radical instinct of his nature and the central mainspring of his action as to pass for a man of rather inferior than superior intelligence to the less blunt and simple natures of those on whom he plays with a touch so unerring at the pleasure of his merciless will. One only thing he cannot do : he cannot make Desdemona doubt of Othello. The first terrible outbreak of his gathering passion in a triple peal of thunder fails to convince her that she has erred in believing him incapable of jealousy. She can only believe that he has vented

upon her the irritation aroused by others, and repent that she should have charged him even in thought with unkindness on no more serious account than this. ‘Nay, we must think men are not gods’: and she had been but inconsiderate and over-exacting, an ‘unhandsome warrior’ unfit to bear the burden and the heat of the day—of a lifelong union and a fellowship in battle and struggle against the trials and the tests of chance—to repine internally for a moment on such a score as that.

Were no other proof extant and flagrant of the palpable truth that Shakespeare excelled all other men of all time on record as a poet in the most proper and literal sense—as a creator of man and woman—there would be overflowing and overwhelming proof of it in the creation and interaction of these three characters. In the more technical and lyrical sense of the word, no less than in height of prophetic power, in depth of reconciling and atoning inspiration, he is excelled by Æschylus; though surely, on the latter score, by Æschylus alone. But if the unique and marvellous power which at the close of the *Oresteia* leaves us impressed with a crowning and final sense of high spiritual calm and austere consolation in face of all the mystery of suffering and of sin—if this supreme gift of the imaginative reason was no more shared by Shakespeare than by any poet or prophet or teacher of Hebrew origin, it was his and his alone to set before us the tragic problem of character and event, of all action and all passion, all evil and all good, all natural joy and sorrow and chance and change, in such fullness and perfection of variety, with such harmony and supremacy of justice and of truth, that no man known to historic record ever glorified the world whom it would have been so utterly natural and so

comparatively rational to fall down before and worship as a God.

For nothing human is ever for a moment above the reach or beyond the scope or beneath the notice of his all but superhuman genius. In this very play he sets before mankind for ever not only the perfect models of heroic love and honour, of womanly sweetness and courage, of intelligent activity and joyous energy in evil, but also an unsurpassable type of the tragicomic dullard. Roderigo is not only Iago's but (in Dryden's masterly phrase) 'God Almighty's fool.' And Shakespeare shows the poor devil no more mercy than Iago or than God. You see at once that he was born to be plundered, cudgelled, and killed—if he tries to play the villain—like a dog. No lighter comic relief than this rather grim and pitiless exhibition of the typic fool could have been acceptable or admissible on the stage of so supreme a tragedy.

Such humorous realism—and it is excellent of its kind—as half relieves and half intensifies the horror of Cinthio's tale may serve as well as any other point of difference to show with what matchless tact of transfiguration by selection and rejection the hand of Shakespeare wrought his will and set his mark on the materials left ready for it by the hand of a lesser genius. The ancient waylays and maims the lieutenant on a dark night as he comes from the house of a harlot 'with whom he was wont to solace himself'; and when the news gets abroad next morning, and reaches the ears of Desdemona, 'she, who was of a loving nature and thought not that evil should thence befall her, shewed that she had right great sorrow for such a mishap. Hereof the Moor took the worst opinion that might be, and went to find the ancient, and said to him, "Thou knowest well that my ass of a wife

is in so great trouble for the lieutenant's mishap that she is like to run mad." "And how could you," said he, "deem otherwise, seeing that he is her soul?" "Her soul, eh?" replied the Moor. "I will pluck—that will I—the soul from her body."

Shakespeare and his one disciple Webster alone could have afforded to leave this masterly bit of dialogue unused or untranslated. For they alone would so have elevated and ennobled the figure of the protagonist as to make it unimaginable that he could have talked in this tone of his wife and her supposed paramour with the living instrument of his revenge. Could he have done so, he might have been capable of playing the part played by the merciless Moor who allows the ancient to thrash her to death with a stocking stuffed with sand. No later master of realistic fiction can presumably have surpassed the simple force of impression and effect conveyed by this direct and unlovely narrative.

' And as they debated with each other whether the lady should be done to death by poison or dagger, and resolved not on either the one or the other of these, the ancient said, " A way there is come into my mind whereby you shall satisfy yourself, and there shall be no suspicion of it whatever. And it is this. The house wherein you dwell is very old, and the ceiling of your chamber has many chinks in it. I will that with a stocking full of sand we smite Desdemona so sore that she die thereof, whereby there may seem on her no sign of blows: when she shall be dead, we will make part of the ceiling fall, and will shatter the lady's head; feigning that a beam as it fell has shattered it and killed her: and in this wise there shall be no one who may conceive any suspicion of you, every man believing that her death has befallen by accident."

The cruel counseل pleased the Moor, and after abiding the time that seemed convenient to him, he being one night with her abed, and having already hidden the ancient in a little chamber that opened into the bed-chamber, the ancient, according to the order taken between them, made some manner of noise in the little chamber : and, hearing it, the Moor said, suddenly, to his wife, " Hast thou heard that noise ? " " I have heard it," said she. " Get up," subjoined the Moor, " and see what is the matter." Up rose the hapless Desdemona, and, as soon as she came near the little chamber, forth came thereout the ancient, who, being a strong man, and of good muscle, with the stocking which he had ready gave her a cruel blow in the middle of her back, whereby the lady instantly fell, without being able wellnigh to draw breath. But with that little voice that she could get she called on the Moor to help her, and he, risen out of bed, said to her, " Most wicked lady, thou hast the wage of thine unchastity : thus fare those women, who, feigning to love their husbands, set horns on their heads." The wretched lady, hearing this, and feeling herself come to her end, inasmuch as the ancient had given her another blow, said that in witness of her faith she called upon the divine justice, seeing that the world's failed her. And as she called on God to help her, when the third blow followed, she lay slain by the villainous ancient. Then, having laid her in bed, and shattered her head, he and the Moor made the roof-tree of the chamber fall, as they had devised between them, and the Moor began to call for help, for the house was falling : at whose voice the neighbours came running, and having uncovered the bed, they found the lady under the roof-beams dead.'

We are a long way off Shakespeare in this powerfully

dramatic and realistic scene of butchery : it is a far cry from Othello, a nature made up of love and honour, of resolute righteousness and heroic pity, to the relentless and deliberate ruffian whose justice is as brutal in its ferocity as his caution is cold-blooded in its foresight. The sacrificial murder of Desdemona is no butchery, but tragedy—terrible as ever tragedy may be, but not more terrible than beautiful ; from the first kiss to the last stab, when the sacrificing priest of retribution immolates the victim whose blood he had borne to shed for pity of her beauty till impelled to forget his first impulse and shed it for pity of her suffering. His words can bear no other meaning, can imply no other action, that would not be burlesque rather than grotesque in its horror. And the commentators or annotators who cannot understand or will not allow that a man in almost unimaginable passion of anguish may not be perfectly and sedately mindful of consistency and master of himself must explain how Desdemona manages to regain her breath so as to speak three times and utter the most heavenly falsehood that ever put truth to shame, after being stifled to death. To recover breath enough to speak, to think, and to lie in defence of her slayer, can hardly be less than to recover breath enough to revive and live, if undespatched by some sharper and more summary method of homicide. The fitful and intermittent lack of stage directions which has caused and perpetuated this somewhat short-sighted oversight is not a more obvious evidence of the fact that Shakespeare's text has lost more than any other and lesser poet's for want of the author's revision than is the misplacing of a letter which, as far as I know, has never yet been set right. When Othello hears that Iago has instigated Roderigo to assassinate Cassio, he exclaims,

'O villain !' and Cassio ejaculates, 'Most heathenish, and most gross !' The sense is improved and the metre is rectified when we perceive that the original printer mistook the word 'villanie' for the word 'villaine.' Such corrections of an unrevised text may seem slight and trivial matters to Englishmen who give thanks for the like labour when lavished on second-rate or third-rate poets of classical antiquity : the toil bestowed by a Bentley or a Porson on Euripides or Horace must naturally, in the judgment of universities, seem wasted on Shakespeare or on Shelley.

One of the very few poets to be named with these has left on everlasting record the deliberate expression of his judgment that *Othello* combines and unites the qualities of *King Lear*, 'the most tremendous effort of Shakespeare as a poet' (a verdict with which I may venture to express my full and absolute agreement), and of *Hamlet*, his most tremendous effort 'as a philosopher or meditator.' It may be so : and Coleridge may be right in his estimate that '*Othello* is the union of the two.' I should say myself, but with no thought of setting my opinion against that of the man who at his best was now and then the greatest of all poets and all critics, that the fusion of thought and passion, inspiration and meditation, was at its height in *King Lear*. But in *Othello* we get the pure poetry of natural and personal emotion, unqualified by the righteous doubt and conscientious intelligence which instigate and impede the will and the action of *Hamlet*. The collision and the contrast of passion and intellect, of noble passion and infernal intellect, was never before and can never be again presented and verified as in this most tragic of all tragedies that ever the supreme student of humanity bequeathed for the study of all

time. As a poet and a thinker Æschylus was the equal, if not the superior, of Shakespeare ; as a creator, a revealer, and an interpreter, infinite in his insight and his truthfulness, his tenderness and his wisdom, his justice and his mercy, no man who ever lived can stand beside the author of *Othello*.

KING RICHARD II

IT is a truth more curious than difficult to verify that there was a time when the greatest genius ever known among the sons of men was uncertain of the future and unsure of the task before it ; when the one unequalled and unapproachable master of the one supreme art which implies and includes the mastery of the one supreme science perceptible and accessible by man stood hesitating between the impulsive instinct for dramatic poetry, the crown and consummation of all philosophies, the living incarnation of creative and intelligent godhead, and the facile seduction of elegiac and idyllic verse, of meditative and uncreative song : between the music of Orpheus and the music of Tibullus. The legendary choice of Hercules was of less moment than the actual choice of Shakespeare between the influence of Robert Greene and the influence of Christopher Marlowe.

The point of most interest in the tragedy or history of *King Richard II.* is the obvious evidence which it gives of the struggle between the worse and the better genius of its author. ‘ ‘Tis now full tide ‘tween night and day.’ The author of *Selimus* and *Andronicus* is visibly contending with the author of *Faustus* and *Edward II.* for the mastery of Shakespeare’s poetic and dramatic adolescence. Already the bitter hatred which was soon to vent itself in the raging rancour of his dying utterance must have been kindled in the unhappy heart of Greene by comparison of his original work with the few lines, or possibly the scene or two,

in his unlovely though not unsuccessful tragedy of *Titus Andronicus*, which had been retouched or supplied by Shakespeare ; whose marvellous power of transfiguration in the act of imitation was never overmatched in any early work of a Raffaelle while yet the disciple of a Perugino. There are six lines in that uncomfortable play which can only have been written, if any trust may be put in the evidence of intelligent comparison, by Shakespeare ; and yet they are undoubtedly in the style of Greene, who could only have written them if the spirit of Shakespeare had passed into him for five minutes or so :

King, be thy thoughts imperious, like thy name.
 Is the sun dimmed that gnats do fly in it ?
 The eagle suffers little birds to sing,
 And is not careful what they mean thereby,
 Knowing that with the shadow of his wing
 He can at pleasure stint their melody.

There is nothing so fine as that in the elegiac or rhyming scenes or passages of *King Richard II*. And yet it is not glaringly out of place among the *sottes monstruosités*—if I may borrow a phrase applied by Michelet to a more recent literary creation—of the crazy and chaotic tragedy in which a writer of gentle and idyllic genius attempted to play the part which his friend Marlowe and their supplanter Shakespeare were born to originate and to sustain. To use yet another and a most admirable French phrase, the author of *Titus Andronicus* is evidently a *mouton enragé*. The mad sheep who has broken the bounds of his pastoral sheepfold has only, in his own opinion, to assume the skin of a wolf, and the tragic stage must acknowledge him as a lion. Greene, in his best works of prose fiction and in his lyric and elegiac idylls, is as surely the purest and gentlest of writers as he was the most

reckless and disreputable of men. And when ambition or hunger lured or lashed him into the alien field of tragic poetry, his first and last notion of the work in hand was simply to revel and wallow in horrors after the fashion, by no means of a wild boar, but merely of a wether gone distracted.

Nevertheless, the influence of this unlucky trespasser on tragedy is too obvious in too much of the text of *King Richard II.* to be either questioned or overlooked. Coleridge, whose ignorance of Shakespeare's predecessors was apparently as absolute as it is assuredly astonishing in the friend of Lamb, has attempted by super-subtle advocacy to explain and excuse, if not to justify and glorify, the crudities and incongruities of dramatic conception and poetic execution which signalise this play as unmistakably the author's first attempt at historic drama : it would perhaps be more exactly accurate to say, at dramatic history. But they are almost as evident as the equally wonderful and youthful genius of the poet. The grasp of character is uncertain : the exposition of event is inadequate. The reader or spectator unversed in the byways of history has to guess at what has already happened—how, why, when, where, and by whom the prince whose murder is the matter in debate at the opening of the play has been murdered. He gets so little help or light from the poet that he can only guess at random, with blind assumption or purblind hesitation, what may be the right or wrong of the case which is not even set before him. The scolding-match between Bolingbroke and Mowbray, fine in their primitive way as are the last two speeches of the latter disclaimer, is liker the work of a pre-Marlowite than the work of Marlowe's disciple. The whole scene is merely literary, if not purely academic : and the seemingly casual interchange of

rhyme and blank verse is more wayward and fitful than even in *Romeo and Juliet*. That the finest passage is in rhyme, and is given to a character about to vanish from the action of the play, is another sign of poetical and intellectual immaturity. The second scene has in it a breath of true passion and a touch of true pathos : but even if the subject had been more duly and definitely explained, it would still have been comparatively wanting in depth of natural passion and pungency of natural pathos. The third scene, full of beautifully fluent and plentifully inefficient writing, reveals the protagonist of the play as so pitifully mean and cruel a weakling that no future action or suffering can lift him above the level which divides and purifies pity from contempt. And this, if mortal manhood may venture to pass judgment on immortal godhead, I must say that Shakespeare does not seem to me to have seen. The theatrical trickery which masks and reveals the callous cruelty and the heartless hypocrisy of the histrionic young tyrant is enough to remove him once for all beyond reach of manly sympathy or compassion unqualified by scorn. If we can ever be sorry for anything that befalls so vile a sample of royalty, our sorrow must be so diluted and adulterated by recollection of his wickedness and baseness that its tribute could hardly be acceptable to any but the most pitiable example or exception of mankind. But this is not enough for the relentless persistence in spiritual vivisection that seems to guide and animate the poet's manipulation and evolution of a character which at once excites a contempt and hatred only to be superseded by the loathing and abhorrence aroused at thought of the dastardly ruffian by the deathbed of his father's noble and venerable brother. The magnificent poetry which glorifies the opening scene of the second act,

however dramatically appropriate and effective in its way, is yet so exuberant in lyric and elegiac eloquence that readers or spectators may conceivably have thought the young Shakespeare less richly endowed by nature as a dramatist than as a poet. It is not of the speaker or the hearer that we think as we read the most passionate panegyric on his country ever set to hymnal harmonies by the greatest of patriotic poets but Æschylus alone : it is simply of England and of Shakespeare.

The bitter prolongation of the play upon words which answers the half-hearted if not heartless inquiry, ‘ How is ’t with aged Gaunt ? ’ is a more dramatic touch of homelier and nearer nature to which Coleridge has done no more than exact justice in his admirable comment : ‘ A passion there is that carries off its own excess by plays on words as naturally, and therefore as appropriately to drama, as by gesticulations, looks, or tones.’ And the one thoroughly noble and nobly coherent figure in the poem disappears as with a thunderclap or the sound of a trumpet calling to judgment a soul too dull in its baseness, too decrepit in its degradation, to hear or understand the summons.

Live in thy shame, but die not shame with thee !
These words hereafter thy tormentors be !

But the poor mean spirit of the hearer is too narrow and too shallow to feel the torment which a nobler soul in its adversity would have recognised by the revelation of remorse.

With the passing of John of Gaunt the moral grandeur of the poem passes finally away. Whatever of interest we may feel in any of the surviving figures is transitory, intermittent, and always qualified by a sense of ethical inconsistency and intellectual inferiority. There is not a man among them : unless it be the Bishop of Carlisle :

and he does but flash across the action for an ineffectual instant. There is often something attractive in Aumerle: indeed, his dauntless and devoted affection for the king makes us sometimes feel as though there must be something not unpitiable or unlovable in the kinsman who could inspire and retain such constancy of regard in a spirit so much manlier than his own. But the figure is too roughly and too thinly sketched to be thoroughly memorable as a man's: and his father's is an incomparable, an incredible, an unintelligible and a monstrous nullity. Coleridge's attempt to justify the ways of York to man—to any man of common sense and common sentiment—is as amusing in Coleridge as it would be amazing in any other and therefore in any lesser commentator.

In the scene at Windsor Castle between the Queen and her husband's minions the idyllic or elegiac style again supplants and supersedes the comparatively terse and dramatic manner of dialogue between the noblemen whom we have just seen lashed into disgust and goaded into revolt by the villainy and brutality of the rascal king. The dialogue is beautiful and fanciful: it makes a very pretty eclogue: none other among the countless writers of Elizabethan eclogues could have equalled it. But if we look for anything more or for anything higher than this, we must look elsewhere: and we shall not look in vain if we turn to the author of *Edward the Second*. When the wretched York creeps in, we have undoubtedly such a living and drivelling picture of hysterical impotence on the downward grade to dotage and distraction as none but Shakespeare could have painted. When Bolingbroke reappears and Harry Percy appears on the stage of the poet who has bestowed on him a generous portion from the inexhaustible treasure of his own immortal life, we find ourselves

again among men, and are comforted and refreshed by the change. The miserable old regent's histrionic attempt to play the king and rebuke the rebel is so admirably pitiful that his last unnatural and monstrous appearance in the action of the play might possibly be explained or excused on the score of dotage—an active and feverish fit of impassioned and demented dotage.

The inspired effeminacy and the fanciful puerility which dunces attribute to the typical character of a representative poet never found such graceful utterance as the greatest of poets has given to the unmanliest of his creatures when Richard lands in Wales. Coleridge credits the poor wretch with 'an intense love of his country,' intended to 'redeem him in the hearts of the audience' in spite of the fact that 'even in this love there is something feminine and personal.' There is nothing else in it: as anybody but Coleridge would have seen. It is exquisitely pretty and utterly unimaginable as the utterance of a man. The two men who support him on either side, the loyal priest and the gallant kinsman, offer him words of manly counsel and manful cheer. He answers them with an outbreak of such magnificent poetry as might almost have been uttered by the divine and unknown and unimaginable poet who gave to eternity the Book of Job: but in this case also the futility of intelligence is as perfect as the sublimity of speech. And his utter collapse on the arrival of bad tidings provokes a counter-change of poetry as splendid in utterance of abjection and despair as the preceding rhapsody in expression of confidence and pride. The scene is still rather amœbæan than dramatic: it is above the reach of Euripides, but more like the imaginable work of a dramatic and tragic Theocritus than the possible work of a Sophocles

when content to give us nothing more nearly perfect and more comparatively sublime than the *Trachinie*. And it is even more amusing than curious that the courtly censors who cancelled and suppressed the scene of Richard's deposition should not have cut away the glorious passage in which the vanity of kingship is confronted, by the grovelling repentance of a king, with the grinning humiliation of death. The dramatic passion of this second great speech is as unmistakable as the lyric emotion of the other. And the utter collapse of heart and spirit which follows on the final stroke of bad tidings at once completes the picture of the man, and concludes in equal harmony the finest passage of the poem and the most memorable scene in the play.

The effect of the impression made by it is so elaborately sustained in the following scene as almost to make a young student wonder at the interest taken by the young Shakespeare in the development or evolution of such a womanish or semivirile character. The style is not exactly verbose, as we can hardly deny that it is in the less passionate parts of the second and third acts of *King John* : but it is exuberant and effusive, elegiac and Ovidian, in a degree which might well have made his admirers doubt, and gravely doubt, whether the future author of *Othello* would ever be competent to take and hold his place beside the actual author of *Faustus*. Marlowe did not spend a tithe of the words or a tithe of the pains on the presentation of a character neither more worthy of contempt nor less worthy of compassion. And his Edward is at least as living and convincing, as tragic and pathetic a figure as Shakespeare's Richard.

The garden scene which closes this memorable third act is a very pretty eclogue, not untouched with tragic

rather than idyllic emotion. The fourth act opens upon a morally chaotic introduction of incongruous causes, inexplicable plaintiffs, and incomprehensible defendants. Whether Aumerle or Fitzwater or Surrey or Bagot is right or wrong, honourable or villainous, no reader or spectator is given a chance of guessing : it is a mere cockpit squabble. And the scene of deposition which follows, full as it is of graceful and beautiful writing, need only be set against the scene of deposition in *Edward the Second* to show the difference between rhetorical and dramatic poetry, emotion and passion, eloquence and tragedy, literature and life. The young Shakespeare's scene is full to superfluity of fine verses and fine passages : his young compeer's or master's is from end to end one magnificent model of tragedy, ' simple, sensuous, and passionate ' as Milton himself could have desired : Milton, the second as Shakespeare was the first of the great English poets who were pupils and debtors of Christopher Marlowe. It is pure poetry and perfect drama : the fancy is finer and the action more lifelike than here. Only once or twice do we come upon such a line as this in the pathetic but exuberant garrulity of Richard : ' While that my wretchedness doth bait myself.' That is worthy of Marlowe. And what follows is certainly pathetic : though certainly there is a good deal of it.

The last act might rather severely than unfairly be described as a series of six tragic or tragicomic eclogues. The first scene is so lovely that no reader worthy to enjoy it will care to ask whether it is or is not so lifelike as to convey no less of conviction than all readers must feel of fascination in the continuous and faultless melody of utterance and tenderness of fancy which make it in its way an incomparable idyl. From the dramatic point of view it might certainly be objected

that we know nothing of the wife, and that what we know of the husband does not by any means tend to explain the sudden pathos and sentimental sympathy of their parting speeches. The first part of the next scene is as beautiful and blameless an example of dramatic narrative as even a Greek poet could have given at such length : but in the latter part of it we cannot but see and acknowledge again the dramatic immaturity of the poet who in a very few years was to reveal himself as beyond all question, except from the most abject and impudent of dunces, the greatest imaginable dramatist or creator ever born into immortality. Style and metre are rough, loose, and weak : the dotage of York becomes lunacy. *Sa folie en furie est tournée.* The scene in which he clamours for the blood of his son is not in any proper sense tragic or dramatic : it is a very ugly eclogue, artificial in manner and unnatural in substance. No feebler or unlovelier example exists of those 'jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits' which Marlowe's imperial rebuke should already have withered into silence on the lips of the veriest Marsyas among all the amœbæan rhymesters of his voluble and effervescent generation.

The better nature of the young Shakespeare revives in the closing scenes : though Exton is a rather insufficient ruffian for the part of so important an assassin. We might at least have seen or heard of him before he suddenly chips the shell as a full-fledged murderer. The last soliloquy of the king is wonderful in its way, and beautiful from any point of view : it shows once more the influence of Marlowe's example in the curious trick of selection and transcription of texts for sceptic meditation and analytic dissection. But we see rather more of the poet and less of his creature the man than Marlowe might have given us. The inter-

lude of the groom, on the other hand, gives promise of something different in power and pathos from the poetry of Marlowe : but the scene of slaughter which follows is not quite satisfactory : it is almost boyish in its impetuosity of buffeting and bloodshed. The last scene, with its final reversion to rhyme, may be described in Richard's own previous words as good, 'and yet not greatly good.'

Of the three lines on which the greatest genius that ever made earth more splendid, and the name of man more glorious, than without the passage of its presence they could have been, chose alternately or successively to work, the line of tragedy was that on which its promise or assurance of future supremacy was first made manifest. The earliest comedies of Shakespeare, overflowing with fancies and exuberant in beauties as they are, gave no sign of inimitable power : their joyous humour and their sunbright poetry were charming rather than promising qualities. The imperfections of his first historic play, on which I trust I have not touched with any semblance of even the most unwilling or unconscious irreverence, are surely more serious, more obvious, more obtrusive, than the doubtless undeniable and indisputable imperfections of *Romeo and Juliet*. If the style of love-making in that loveliest of all youthful poems is fantastically unlike the actual courtship of modern lovers, it is not unliker than is the style of love-making in favour with Dante and his fellow-poets of juvenile and fanciful passion. Setting aside this objection, the first of Shakespeare's tragedies is not more beautiful than blameless. There is no incoherence of character, no inconsistency of action. Aumerle is hardly so living a figure as Tybalt : Capulet is as indisputably probable as York is obviously impossible in the part of a headstrong tyrant. There is

little feminine interest in the earliest comedies : there is less in the first history. In the first tragedy there is nothing else, or nothing but what is so subservient and subordinate as simply to bring it out and throw it into relief. In the work of a young poet this difference would or should be enough to establish and explain the fact that though he might be greater than all other men in history and comedy, he was still greater in tragedy.

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

TO THE MEMORY OF
CHARLES LAMB

DEDICATION

*When stark oblivion froze above their names
Whose glory shone round Shakespeare's, bright as now,
One eye beheld their light shine full as fame's,
One hand unveiled it : this did none but thou.
Love, stronger than forgetfulness and sleep,
Rose, and bade memory rise, and England hear :
And all the harvest left so long to reap
Shone ripe and rich in every sheaf and ear.*

*A child it was who first by grace of thine
Communed with gods who share with thee their shrine :
Elder than thou wast ever now I am,
Now that I lay before thee in thanksgiving
Praise of dead men divine and everliving
Whose praise is thine as thine is theirs, Charles Lamb.*

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

THE first great English poet was the father of English tragedy and the creator of English blank verse. Chaucer and Spenser were great writers and great men : they shared between them every gift which goes to the making of a poet except the one which alone can make a poet, in the proper sense of the word, great. Neither pathos nor humour nor fancy nor invention will suffice for that : no poet is great as a poet whom no one could ever pretend to recognise as sublime. Sublimity is the test of imagination as distinguished from invention or from fancy : and the first English poet whose powers can be called sublime was Christopher Marlowe.

The majestic and exquisite excellence of various lines and passages in Marlowe's first play must be admitted to relieve, if it cannot be allowed to redeem, the stormy monotony of Titanic truculence which blusters like a simoom through the noisy course of its ten fierce acts. With many and heavy faults, there is something of genuine greatness in *Tamburlaine the Great* ; and for two grave reasons it must always be remembered with distinction and mentioned with honour. It is the first poem ever written in English blank verse, as distinguished from mere rhymeless decasyllabics ; and it contains one of the noblest passages, perhaps indeed the noblest in the literature of the world, ever written by one of the greatest masters of poetry in loving praise of the glorious delights and sublime submission to the everlasting

limits of his art. In its highest and most distinctive qualities, in unfaltering and infallible command of the right note of music and the proper tone of colour for the finest touches of poetic execution, no poet of the most elaborate modern school, working at ease upon every consummate resource of luxurious learning and leisurely refinement, has ever excelled the best and most representative work of a man who had literally no models before him, and probably or evidently was often, if not always, compelled to write against time for his living.

The just and generous judgment passed by Goethe on the *Faustus* of his English predecessor in tragic treatment of the same subject is somewhat more than sufficient to counterbalance the slighting or the sneering references to that magnificent poem which might have been expected from the ignorance of Byron or the incompetence of Hallam. And the particular note of merit observed, the special point of the praise conferred, by the great German poet should be no less sufficient to dispose of the vulgar misconception yet lingering among sciolists and pretenders to criticism, which regards a writer than whom no man was ever born with a finer or a stronger instinct for perfection of excellence in execution as a mere noble savage of letters, a rough self-taught sketcher or scribbler of crude and rude genius, whose unhewn blocks of verse had in them some veins of rare enough metal to be quarried and polished by Shakespeare. What most impressed the author of *Faust* in the work of Marlowe was a quality the want of which in the author of *Manfred* is proof enough to consign his best work to the second or third class at most. 'How greatly it is all planned !' the first requisite of all great work, and one of which the highest genius

possible to a greatly gifted barbarian could by no possibility understand the nature or conceive the existence. That Goethe 'had thought of translating it' is perhaps hardly less precious a tribute to its greatness than the fact that it has been actually and admirably translated by the matchless translator of Shakespeare—the son of Victor Hugo ; whose labour of love may thus be said to have made another point in common, and forged as it were another link of union, between Shakespeare and the young master of Shakespeare's youth. Of all great poems in dramatic form it is perhaps the most remarkable for absolute singleness of aim and simplicity of construction ; yet is it wholly free from all possible imputation of monotony or aridity. *Tamburlaine* is monotonous in the general roll and flow of its stately and sonorous verse through a noisy wilderness of perpetual bluster and slaughter ; but the unity of tone and purpose in *Doctor Faustus* is not unrelieved by change of manner and variety of incident. The comic scenes, written evidently with as little of labour as of relish, are for the most part scarcely more than transcripts, thrown into the form of dialogue, from a popular prose *History of Doctor Faustus* ; and therefore should be set down as little to the discredit as to the credit of the poet. Few masterpieces of any age in any language can stand beside this tragic poem—it has hardly the structure of a play—for the qualities of terror and splendour, for intensity of purpose and sublimity of note. In the vision of Helen, for example, the intense perception of loveliness gives actual sublimity to the sweetness and radiance of mere beauty in the passionate and spontaneous selection of words the most choice and perfect ; and in like manner the sublimity of simplicity in Marlowe's conception and expression of

the agonies endured by Faustus under the immediate imminence of his doom gives the highest note of beauty, the quality of absolute fitness and propriety, to the sheer straightforwardness of speech in which his agonising horror finds vent ever more and more terrible from the first to the last equally beautiful and fearful verse of that tremendous monologue which has no parallel in all the range of tragedy.

It is now a commonplace of criticism to observe and regret the decline of power and interest after the opening acts of *The Jew of Malta*. This decline is undeniable, though even the latter part of the play is not wanting in rough energy and a coarse kind of interest ; but the first two acts would be sufficient foundation for the durable fame of a dramatic poet. In the blank verse of Milton alone, who perhaps was hardly less indebted than Shakespeare was before him to Marlowe as the first English master of word-music in its grander forms, has the glory or the melody of passages in the opening soliloquy of Barabas been possibly surpassed. The figure of the hero before it degenerates into caricature is as finely touched as the poetic execution is excellent ; and the rude and rapid sketches of the minor characters show at least some vigour and vivacity of touch.

In *Edward the Second* the interest rises and the execution improves as visibly and as greatly with the course of the advancing story as they decline in *The Jew of Malta*. The scene of the king's deposition at Kenilworth is almost as much finer in tragic effect and poetic quality as it is shorter and less elaborate than the corresponding scene in Shakespeare's *King Richard II*. The terror of the death-scene undoubtedly rises into horror ; but this horror is with skilful simplicity of treatment preserved from passing

into disgust. In pure poetry, in sublime and splendid imagination, this tragedy is excelled by *Doctor Faustus*; in dramatic power and positive impression of natural effect it is as certainly the masterpiece of Marlowe. It was almost inevitable, in the hands of any poet but Shakespeare, that none of the characters represented should be capable of securing or even exciting any finer sympathy or more serious interest than attends on the mere evolution of successive events or the mere display of emotions (except always in the great scene of the deposition) rather animal than spiritual in their expression of rage or tenderness or suffering. The exact balance of mutual effect, the final note of scenic harmony between ideal conception and realistic execution, is not yet struck with perfect accuracy of touch and security of hand; but on this point also Marlowe has here come nearer by many degrees to Shakespeare than any of his other predecessors have ever come near to Marlowe.

Of *The Massacre at Paris* it is impossible to judge fairly from the garbled fragment of its genuine text which is all that has come down to us. To Mr. Collier, among numberless other obligations, we owe the discovery of a striking passage excised in the piratical edition which gives us the only version extant of this unlucky play; and which, it must be allowed, contains nothing of quite equal value. This is obviously an occasional and polemical work, and being as it is overcharged with the anti-Catholic passion of the time, has a typical quality which gives it some empirical significance and interest. That anti-papal ardour is indeed the only note of unity in a rough and ragged chronicle which shambles and stumbles onward from the death of Queen Jeanne of Navarre to the murder of the last Valois. It is possible to conjecture what it

would be fruitless to affirm, that it gave a hint in the next century to Nathaniel Lee for his far superior and really admirable tragedy on the same subject, issued ninety-seven years after the death of Marlowe.

The tragedy of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, was probably completed for the stage after that irreparable and incalculable loss to English letters by Thomas Nash, the worthiest English precursor of Swift in vivid, pure, and passionate prose, embodying the most terrible and splendid qualities of a personal and social satirist; a man gifted also with some fair faculty of elegiac and even lyric verse, but in no wise qualified to put on the buskin left behind him by the 'famous gracer of tragedians,' as Marlowe had already been designated by their common friend Greene from among the worthiest of his fellows. In this somewhat thin-spun and evidently hasty play a servile fidelity to the text of Virgil's narrative has naturally resulted in the failure which might have been expected from an attempt at once to transcribe what is essentially inimitable and to reproduce it under the hopelessly alien conditions of dramatic adaptation. The one really noble passage in a generally feeble and incomposite piece of work is, however, uninspired by the unattainable model to which the dramatists have been only too obsequious in their subservience.

It is as nearly certain as anything can be which depends chiefly upon cumulative and collateral evidence that the better part of what is best in the serious scenes of *King Henry VI.* is mainly the work of Marlowe. That he is, at any rate, the principal author of the second and third plays passing under that name among the works of Shakespeare, but first and imperfectly printed as *The Contention between the two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, can hardly

be now a matter of debate among competent judges. The crucial difficulty of criticism in this matter is to determine, if indeed we should not rather say to conjecture, the authorship of the humorous scenes in prose, showing as they generally do a power of comparatively high and pure comic realism to which nothing in the acknowledged works of any pre-Shakespearean dramatist is even remotely comparable. Yet, especially in the original text of these scenes as they stand unpurified by the ultimate revision of Shakespeare, there are tones and touches which recall rather the clownish horseplay and homely ribaldry of his predecessors than anything in the lighter interludes of his very earliest plays. We find the same sort of thing which we find in their writings, only better done than they usually do it, rather than such work as Shakespeare's a little worse done than usual. And even in the final text of the tragic or metrical scenes the highest note struck is always, with one magnificent and unquestionable exception, rather in the key of Marlowe at his best than of Shakespeare while yet in great measure his disciple.

It is another commonplace of criticism to affirm that Marlowe had not a touch of comic genius, not a gleam of wit in him, or a twinkle of humour : but it is an indisputable fact that he had. In *The Massacre at Paris*, the soliloquy of the soldier lying in wait for the minion of Henri III. has the same very rough but very real humour as a passage in the *Contention* which was cancelled by the reviser. The same hand is unmistakable in both these broad and boyish outbreaks of unseemly but undeniable fun : and if we might wish it rather less indecorous, we must admit that the tradition which denies all sense of humour and all instinct of wit to the first great poet

of England is no less unworthy of serious notice or elaborate refutation than the charges and calumnies of an informer who was duly hanged the year after Marlowe's death. For if the same note of humour is struck in an undoubted play of Marlowe's and in a play of disputed authorship, it is evident that the rest of the scene in the latter play must also be Marlowe's. And in that unquestionable case the superb and savage humour of the terribly comic scenes which represent with such rough magnificence of realism the riot of Jack Cade and his ruffians through the ravaged streets of London must be recognisable as no other man's than his. It is a pity we have not before us for comparison the comic scenes or burlesque interludes of *Tamburlaine* which the printer or publisher, as he had the impudence to avow in his prefatory note, purposely omitted and left out.

The author of *A Study of Shakespeare* was therefore wrong, and utterly wrong, when in a book issued some quarter of a century ago he followed the lead of Mr. Dyce in assuming that because the author of *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* 'was as certainly'—and certainly it is difficult to deny that whether as a mere transcriber or as an original dealer in pleasantry he sometimes was—'one of the least and worst among jesters as he was one of the best and greatest among poets,' he could not have had a hand in the admirable comic scenes of *The Taming of a Shrew*. For it is now, I should hope, unnecessary to insist that the able and conscientious editor to whom his fame and his readers owe so great a debt was over hasty in assuming and asserting that he was a poet 'to whom, we have reason to believe, nature had denied even a moderate talent for the humorous.' The serious or would-be poetical scenes of the play are as unmistakably the

work of an imitator as are most of the better passages in *Titus Andronicus* and *King Edward III*. Greene or Peele may be responsible for the bad poetry, but there is no reason to suppose that the great poet whose mannerisms he imitated with so stupid a servility was incapable of the good fun.

Had every copy of Marlowe's boyish version or perversion of Ovid's *Elegies* deservedly perished in the flames to which it was judicially condemned by the sentence of a brace of prelates, it is possible that an occasional bookworm, it is certain that no poetical student, would have deplored its destruction, if its demerits—hardly relieved, as his first competent editor has happily remarked, by the occasional incidence of a fine and felicitous couplet—could in that case have been imagined. His translation of the first book of Lucan alternately rises above the original and falls short of it; often inferior to the Latin in point and weight of expressive rhetoric, now and then brightened by a clearer note of poetry and lifted into a higher mood of verse. Its terseness, vigour, and purity of style would in any case have been praiseworthy, but are nothing less than admirable, if not wonderful, when we consider how close the translator has on the whole (in spite of occasional slips into inaccuracy) kept himself to the most rigid limit of literal representation, phrase by phrase and often line by line. The really startling force and felicity of occasional verses are worthier of remark than the inevitable stiffness and heaviness of others, when the technical difficulty of such a task is duly taken into account.

One of the most faultless lyrics and one of the loveliest fragments in the whole range of descriptive and fanciful poetry would have secured a place for Marlowe among the memorable men of his epoch,

even if his plays had perished with himself. His *Passionate Shepherd* remains ever since unrivalled in its way—a way of pure fancy and radiant melody without break or lapse. The untitled fragment, on the other hand, has been very closely rivalled, perhaps very happily imitated, but only by the greatest lyric poet of England—by Shelley alone. Marlowe's poem of *Hero and Leander*, closing with the sunrise which closes the night of the lovers' union, stands alone in its age, and far ahead of the work of any possible competitor between the death of Spenser and the dawn of Milton. In clear mastery of narrative and presentation, in melodious ease and simplicity of strength, it is not less pre-eminent than in the adorable beauty and impeccable perfection of separate lines or passages.

The place and the value of Christopher Marlowe as a leader among English poets it would be almost impossible for historical criticism to over-estimate. To none of them all, perhaps, have so many of the indebted. Nor was ever any great writer's influence upon his fellows more utterly and unmixedly an influence for good. He first, and he alone, guided Shakespeare into the right way of work; his music, in which there is no echo of any man's before him, found its own echo in the more prolonged but hardly discoverer, the most daring and inspired pioneer, in all our poetic literature. Before him there was neither language. After his arrival the way was prepared, the paths were made straight, for Shakespeare.

JOHN WEBSTER

THERE were many poets in the age of Shakespeare who make us think, as we read them, that the characters in their plays could not have spoken more beautifully, more powerfully, more effectively, under the circumstances imagined for the occasion of their utterance : there are only two who make us feel that the words assigned to the creatures of their genius are the very words they must have said, the only words they could have said, the actual words they assuredly did say. Mere literary power, mere poetic beauty, mere charm of passionate or pathetic fancy, we find in varying degrees dispersed among them all alike ; but the crowning gift of imagination, the power to make us realise that thus and not otherwise it was, that thus and not otherwise it must have been, was given —except by exceptional fits and starts—to none of the poets of their time but only to Shakespeare and to Webster.

Webster, it may be said, was but as it were a limb of Shakespeare : but that limb, it might be replied, was the right arm. ‘The kingly-crowned head, the vigilant eye,’ whose empire of thought, and whose reach of vision no other man’s faculty has ever been found competent to match, are Shakespeare’s alone for ever : but the force of hand, the fire of heart, the fervour of pity, the sympathy of passion, not poetic or theatric merely, but actual and immediate, are qualities in which the lesser poet is not less certainly or less unmistakably pre-eminent than the greater.

And there is no third to be set beside them : not even if we turn from their contemporaries to Shelley himself. All that Beatrice says in *The Cenci* is beautiful and conceivable and admirable : but unless we except her exquisite last words—and even they are more beautiful than inevitable—we shall hardly find what we find in *King Lear* and *The White Devil*, *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfy*; the tone of convincing reality ; the note, as a critic of our own day might call it, of certitude.

There are poets—in our own age, as in all past ages—from whose best work it might be difficult to choose at a glance some verse sufficient to establish their claim—great as their claim may be—to be remembered for ever ; and who yet may be worthy of remembrance among all but the highest. Webster is not one of these : though his fame assuredly does not depend upon the merit of a casual passage here or there, it would be easy to select from any one of his representative plays such examples of the highest, the purest, the most perfect power, as can be found only in the works of the greatest among poets. There is not, as far as my studies have ever extended, a third English poet to whom these words might rationally be attributed by the conjecture of a competent reader:

We cease to grieve, cease to be fortune's slaves,
Nay, cease to die, by dying.

There is a depth of severe sense in them, a height of heroic scorn, or a dignity of quiet cynicism, which can scarcely be paralleled in the bitterest or the fiercest effusions of John Marston or Cyril Tourneur or Jonathan Swift. Nay, were they not put into the mouth of a criminal cynic, they would not seem unworthy of Epictetus. There is nothing so grand in

the part of Edmund ; the one figure in Shakespeare whose aim in life, whose centre of character, is one with the view or the instinct of Webster's two typical villains. Some touches in the part of Flamineo suggest, if not a conscious imitation, an unconscious reminiscence of that prototype ; but the essential and radical originality of Webster's genius is shown in the difference of accent with which the same savage and sarcastic philosophy of self-interest finds expression through the snarl and sneer of his ambitious cynic. Monsters as they may seem of unnatural egotism and unallayed ferocity, the one who dies penitent, though his repentance be as sudden if not as suspicious as any ever wrought by miraculous conversion, dies as thoroughly in character as the one who takes leave of life in a passion of scorn and defiant irony which hardly passes off at last into a mood of mocking and triumphant resignation. There is a cross of heroism in almost all Webster's characters which preserves the worst of them from such hatefulness as disgusts us in certain of Fletcher's or of Ford's : they have in them some salt of manhood, some savour of venturesome and humorous resolution, which reminds us of the heroic age in which the genius that begot them was born and reared—the age of Richard Grenville and Francis Drake, Philip Sidney and William Shakespeare.

The earliest play of Webster's now surviving—if a work so piteously mutilated and defaced can properly be said to survive—is a curious example of the combined freedom and realism with which recent or even contemporary history was habitually treated on the stage during the last years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The noblest poem known to me of this peculiar kind is the play of *Sir Thomas More*, first printed by Mr. Dyce in 1844 for the Shakespeare

Society : the worst must almost certainly be that *Chronicle History of Thomas Lord Cromwell* which the infallible verdict of German intuition has discovered to be 'not only unquestionably Shakespeare's, but worthy to be classed among his best and most perfect works.' About midway between these two I should be inclined to rank *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, a mangled and deformed abridgment of a tragedy by Dekker and Webster on the story of Lady Jane Grey. In this tragedy, as in the two comedies due to the collaboration of the same poets, it appears to me more than probable that Dekker took decidedly the greater part. The shambling and slipshod metre, which seems now and then to hit by mere chance on some pure and tender note of simple and exquisite melody—the lazy vivacity and impulsive inconsequence of style—the fitful sort of slovenly inspiration, with interludes of absolute and headlong collapse—are qualities by which a very novice in the study of dramatic form may recognise the reckless and unmistakable presence of Dekker. The curt and grim precision of Webster's tone, his terse and pungent force of compressed rhetoric, will be found equally difficult to trace in any of these three plays. *Northward Ho*, a clever, coarse, and vigorous study of the realistic sort, has not a note of poetry in it, but is more coherent, more sensibly conceived and more ably constructed, than the rambling history of Wyatt or the hybrid amalgam of prosaic and romantic elements in the compound comedy of *Westward Ho*. All that is of any great value in this amorphous and incongruous product of inventive impatience and impetuous idleness can be as distinctly traced to the hand of Dekker as the crowning glories of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* can be traced to the hand of Shakespeare. Any poet,

even of his time, might have been proud of these verses, but the accent of them is unmistakable as that of Dekker :

Go, let music

Charm with her excellent voice an awful silence
Through all this building, that her sphery soul
May, on the wings of air, in thousand forms
Invisibly fly, yet be enjoyed.

This delicate fluency and distilled refinement of expression ought properly, one would say, to have belonged to a poet of such careful and self-respectful genius as Tennyson's : whereas in the very next speech of the same speaker we stumble over such a phrase as that which closes the following sentence :

We feed, wear rich attires, and strive to cleave
The stars with marble towers, fight battles, spend
Our blood to buy us names, *and, in iron hold,*
Will we eat roots, to imprison fugitive gold.

Which he who can parse, let him scan, and he who can scan, let him construe. It is alike incredible and certain that the writer of such exquisite and blameless verse as that in which the finer scenes of *Old Fortunatus* and *The Honest Whore* are so smoothly and simply and naturally written should have been capable of writing whole plays in this headlong and halting fashion, as helpless and graceless as the action of a spavined horse, or a cripple who should attempt to run.

It is difficult to say what part of these plays should be assigned to Webster. Their rough realistic humour, with its tone of somewhat coarse-grained good-nature, strikes the habitual note of Dekker's comic style : there is nothing of the fierce and scornful intensity, the ardour of passionate and compressed contempt,

which distinguishes the savagely humorous satire of Webster and of Marston, and makes it hopeless to determine by intrinsic evidence how little or how much was added by Webster in the second edition to the original text of Marston's *Malcontent*: unless—which appears to me not unreasonable—we assume that the printer of that edition lied or blundered after the manner of his contemporary kind in attributing on the title-page—as apparently he meant to attribute—any share in the additional scenes or speeches to the original author of the play. In any case, the passages thus added to that grimdest and most sombre of tragicomies are in such exact keeping with the previous text that the keenest scent of the veriest bloodhound among critics could not detect a shade of difference in the savour.

The text of either comedy is generally very fair—as free from corruption as could reasonably be expected. The text of *Sir Thomas Wyatt* is corrupt as well as mutilated. Even in Mr. Dyce's second edition I have noted, not without astonishment, the following flagrant errors left still to glare on us from the distorted and disfigured page. In the sixth scene a single speech of Arundel's contains two of the most palpably preposterous :

The obligation wherein we all stood bound

Cannot be concealed without great reproach
To us and to our issue.

We should of course read 'cancelled' for 'concealed': the sense of the context and the exigence of the verse cry alike aloud for the correction. In the sixteenth line from this we come upon an equally obvious error :

Advice in this I hold it better far,
To keep the course we run, than, seeking change,
Hazard our lives, our honours, and the realm.

It seems hardly credible to those who are aware how much they owe to the excellent scholarship and editorial faculty of Mr. Dyce, that he should have allowed such a misprint as 'heirs' for 'honours' to stand in this last unlucky line. Again, in the next scene, when the popular leader Captain Brett attempts to reassure the country folk who are startled at the sight of his insurgent array, he is made to utter (in reply to the exclamation, 'What's here? soldiers!') the perfectly fatuous phrase, 'Fear not good speech.' Of course—once more—we should read, 'Fear not, good people'; a correction which rectifies the metre as well as the sense.

The play attributed to Webster and Rowley by a publisher of the next generation has been carefully and delicately analysed by a critic of our own time, who naturally finds it easy to distinguish the finer from the homelier part of the compound weft, and to assign what is rough and crude to the inferior, what is interesting and graceful to the superior poet. The authority of the rogue Kirkman may be likened to the outline or profile of Mr. Mantalini's early loves: it is either no authority at all, or at best it is a 'demd' authority. The same swindler who assigned to Webster and Rowley the authorship of *A Cure for a Cuckold* assigned to Shakespeare and Rowley the authorship of an infinitely inferior play—a play of which German sagacity has discovered that 'none of Rowley's other works are equal to this.' Assuredly they are not—in utter stolidity of platitude and absolute impotence of drivel. Rowley was a vigorous artist in comedy and an original master of tragedy:

he may have written the lighter or broader parts of the play which rather unluckily took its name from these, and Webster may have written the more serious or sentimental parts : but there is not the slightest shadow of a reason to suppose it. An obviously apocryphal abortion of the same date, attributed to the same poets by the same knave, has long since been struck off the roll of Webster's works.

The few occasional poems of this great poet are worth study by those who are capable of finding interest in the comparison of slighter with sublimer things, and the detection in minor works of the same style, here revealed by fitful hints in casual phrases, as that which animates and distinguishes even a work so insufficient and incompetent as Webster's 'tragedy' of *The Devil's Law-case*. The noble and impressive extracts from this most incoherent and chaotic of all plays which must be familiar to all students of Charles Lamb are but patches of imperial purple sewn on with the roughest of needles to a garment of the raggedest and coarsest kind of literary serge. Hardly any praise can be too high for their dignity and beauty, their lofty loyalty and simplicity of chivalrous manhood or their deep sincerity of cynical meditation and self-contemptuous mournfulness : and the reader who turns from these magnificent samples to the complete play must expect to find yet another and a yet unknown masterpiece of English tragedy. He will find a crowning example of the famous theorem, that 'the plot is of no use except to bring in the fine things.' The plot is in this instance absurd to a degree so far beyond the most preposterous conception of confused and distracting extravagance that the reader's attention may at times be withdrawn from

the all but unqualified ugliness of its ethical tone or tendency. Two of Webster's favourite types, the meditative murderer or philosophic ruffian, and the impulsive impostor who is liable to collapse into the likeness of a passionate penitent, will remind the reader how much better they appear in tragedies which are carried through to their natural tragic end. But here, where the story is admirably opened and the characters as skilfully introduced, the strong interest thus excited at starting is scattered or broken or trifled away before the action is halfway through : and at its close the awkward violence or irregularity of moral and scenical effect comes to a crowning crisis in the general and mutual condonation of unnatural perjury and attempted murder with which the victims and the criminals agree to hush up all grudges, shake hands all round, and live happy ever after. There is at least one point of somewhat repulsive resemblance between the story of this play and that of Fletcher's *Fair Maid of the Inn* : but Fletcher's play, with none of the tragic touches or interludes of superb and sombre poetry which relieve the incoherence of Webster's, is better laid out and constructed, more amusing if not more interesting and more intelligent if not more imaginative.

A far more creditable and workmanlike piece of work, though glorified by no flashes of such sudden and singular beauty, is the tragedy of *Appius and Virginia*. The almost infinite superiority of Webster to Fletcher as a poet of pure tragedy and a painter of masculine character is in this play as obvious as the inferiority in construction and conduct of romantic story displayed in his attempt at a tragicomedy. From the evidence of style I should judge this play to have been written at an earlier date than *The Devil's*

Law-case: it is, I repeat, far better composed ; better, perhaps, than any other play of the author's : but it has none of his more distinctive qualities ; intensity of idea, concentration of utterance, pungency of expression and ardour of pathos. It is written with noble and equable power of hand, with force and purity and fluency of apt and simple eloquence : there is nothing in it unworthy of the writer : but it is the only one of his unassisted works in which we do not find that especial note of tragic style, concise and pointed and tipped as it were with fire, which usually makes it impossible for the dullest reader to mistake the peculiar presence, the original tone or accent, of John Webster. If the epithet unique had not such a tang of German affectation in it, it would be perhaps the aptest of all adjectives to denote the genius or define the manner of this great poet. But in this tragedy, though whatever is said is well said and whatever is done well done, we miss that sense of positive and inevitable conviction, that instant and profound perception or impression as of immediate and indisputable truth, which is burnt in upon us as we read the more Websterian scenes of Webster's writing. We feel, in short, that thus it may have been : not, as I observed at the opening of these notes, that thus it must have been. The poem does him no discredit ; nay, it does him additional honour, as an evidence of powers more various and many-sided than we should otherwise have known or supposed in him. Indeed, the figure of Virginius is one of the finest types of soldierly and fatherly heroism ever presented on the stage : there is equal force of dramatic effect, equal fervour of eloquent passion, in the scene of his pleading before the senate on behalf of the claims of his suffering and struggling fellow-

soldiers, and in the scene of his return to the camp after the immolation of his daughter. The mere theoretic effect of this latter scene is at once so triumphant and so dignified, so noble in its presentation and so passionate in its restraint, that we feel the high justice and sound reason of the instinct which inspired the poet to prolong the action of his play so far beyond the sacrifice of his heroine. A comparison of Webster's *Virginius* with any of Fletcher's wordy warriors will suffice to show how much nearer to Shakespeare than to Fletcher stands Webster as a tragic or a serious dramatist. Coleridge, not always just to Fletcher, was not unjust in his remark 'what strange self-trumpeters and tongue-bullies all the brave soldiers of Beaumont and Fletcher are'; and again almost immediately—'all B. and F.'s generals are pugilists, or cudgel-fighters, that boast of their bottom and of the "claret" they have shed.' There is nothing of this in *Virginius*; Shakespeare himself has not represented with a more lofty fidelity, in the person of Coriolanus or of Brutus, 'the high Roman fashion' of austere and heroic self-respect. In the other leading or dominant figure of this tragedy there is certainly discernible a genuine and thoughtful originality or freshness of conception; but perhaps there is also recognisable a certain inconsistency of touch. It was well thought of to mingle some alloy of goodness with the wickedness of Appius Claudius, to represent the treacherous and lecherous decemvir as neither kindless nor remorseless, but capable of penitence and courage in his last hour. But Shakespeare, I cannot but think, would have prepared us with more care and more dexterity for the revelation of some such redeeming quality in a character which in the act immediately preceding Webster has represented

as utterly heartless and shameless, brutal in its hypocrisy and impudent in its brutality.

If the works already discussed were their author's only claims to remembrance and honour, they might not suffice to place him on a higher level among our tragic poets than that occupied by Marston and Dekker and Middleton on the one hand, by Fletcher and Massinger and Shirley on the other. *Antonio and Mellida*, *Old Fortunatus*, or *The Changeling*—*The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Duke of Milan*, or *The Traitor*—would suffice to counterweigh (if not, in some cases, to outbalance) the merit of the best among these: the fitful and futile inspiration of *The Devil's Law-case*, and the stately but subdued inspiration of *Appius and Virginia*. That his place was with no subordinate poet—that his station is at Shakespeare's right hand—the evidence supplied by his two great tragedies is disputable by no one who has an inkling of the qualities which confer a right to be named in the same day with the greatest writer of all time.

Æschylus is above all things the poet of righteousness. 'But in any wise, I say unto thee, revere thou the altar of righteousness': this is the crowning admonition of his doctrine, as its crowning prospect is the reconciliation or atonement of the principle of retribution with the principle of redemption, of the powers of the mystery of darkness with the coeternal forces of the spirit of wisdom, of the lord of inspiration and of light. The doctrine of Shakespeare, where it is not vaguer, is darker in its implication of injustice, in its acceptance of accident, than the impression of the doctrine of Æschylus. Fate, irreversible and inscrutable, is the only force of which we feel the impact, of which we trace the sign, in the upshot of

Othello or *King Lear*. The last step into the darkness remained to be taken by 'the most tragic' of all English poets. With Shakespeare—and assuredly not with *Aeschylus*—righteousness itself seems subject and subordinate to the masterdom of fate: but fate itself, in the tragic world of Webster, seems merely the servant or the synonym of chance. The two chief agents in his two great tragedies pass away—the phrase was, perhaps, unconsciously repeated—'in a mist': perplexed, indomitable, defiant of hope and fear; bitter and sceptical and bloody in penitence or impenitence alike. And the mist which encompasses the departing spirits of these moody and mocking men of blood seems equally to involve the lives of their chastisers and their victims. Blind accident and blundering mishap—'such a mistake,' says one of the criminals, 'as I have often seen in a play'—are the steersmen of their fortunes and the doomsmen of their deeds. The effect of this method or the result of this view, whether adopted for dramatic objects or ingrained in the writer's temperament, is equally fit for pure tragedy and unfit for any form of drama not purely tragic in evolution and event. In *The Devil's Law-case* it is offensive, because the upshot is incongruous and insufficient: in *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfy* it is admirable, because the results are adequate and coherent. But in all these three plays alike, and in these three plays only, the peculiar tone of Webster's genius, the peculiar force of his imagination, is distinct and absolute in its fullness of effect. The author of *Appius and Virginia* would have earned an honourable and enduring place in the history of English letters as a worthy member—one among many—of a great school in poetry, a deserving representative of a great epoch.

in literature : but the author of these three plays has a solitary station, an indisputable distinction of his own. The greatest poets of all time are not more mutually independent than this one—a lesser poet only than those greatest—is essentially independent of them all.

The first quality which all readers recognise, and which may strike a superficial reader as the exclusive or excessive note of his genius and his work, is of course his command of terror. Except in *Æschylus*, in Dante, and in Shakespeare, I at least know not where to seek for passages which in sheer force of tragic and noble horror—to the vulgar shock of ignoble or brutal horror he never condescends to submit his reader or subdue his inspiration—may be set against the subtlest, the deepest, the sublimest passages of Webster. Other gifts he had as great in themselves, as precious and as necessary to the poet : but on this side he is incomparable and unique. Neither Marlowe nor Shakespeare had so fine, so accurate, so infallible a sense of the delicate line of demarcation which divides the impressive and the terrible from the horrible and the loathsome—Victor Hugo and Honoré de Balzac from Eugène Sue and Émile Zola. On his theatre we find no presentation of old men with their beards torn off and their eyes gouged out, of young men imprisoned in reeking cesspools and impaled with red-hot spits. Again and again his passionate and daring genius attains the utmost limit and rounds the final goal of tragedy ; never once does it break the bounds of pure poetic instinct. If ever for a moment it may seem to graze that goal too closely, to brush too sharply by those bounds, the very next moment finds it clear of any such risk and remote from any such temptation as sometimes entrapped

or seduced the foremost of its forerunners in the field. And yet this is the field in which its paces are most superbly shown. No name among all the names of great poets will recur so soon as Webster's to the reader who knows what it signifies, as he reads or repeats the verses in which a greater than this great poet—a greater than all since Shakespeare—has expressed the latent mystery of terror which lurks in all the highest poetry or beauty, and distinguishes it inexplicably and inevitably from all that is but a little lower than the highest.

Les aigles sur les bords du Gange et du Caïstre
Sont effrayants ;
Rien de grand qui ne soit confusément sinistre ;
Les noirs pœans,

Les psaumes, la chanson monstrueuse du mage
Ezéchiel,
Font devant notre œil fixe errer la vague image
D'un affreux ciel.

L'empyrée est l'abîme, on y plonge, on y reste
Avec terreur.
Car planer, c'est trembler ; si l'azur est céleste,
C'est par l'horreur.

L'épouvante est au fond des choses les plus belles ;
Les bleus vallons
Font parfois reculer d'effroi les fauves ailes
Des aquilons.

And even in comedy as in tragedy, in prosaic even as in prophetic inspiration, in imitative as in imaginative works of genius, the sovereign of modern poets has detected the same touch of terror wherever the deepest note possible has been struck, the fullest sense possible of genuine and peculiar power conveyed

to the student of lyric or dramatic, epic or elegiac masters.

De là tant de beautés difformes dans leurs œuvres ;
 Le vers charmant
 Est par la torsion subite des couleuvres
 Pris brusquement ;

À de certains moments toutes les jeunes flores
 Dans la forêt
 Ont peur, et sur le front des blanches métaphores
 L'ombre apparaît ;

C'est qu'Horace ou Virgile ont vu soudain le spectre
 Noir se dresser ;
 C'est que là-bas, derrière Amaryllis, Électre
 Vient de passer.

Nor was it the Electra of Sophocles, the calm and impassive accomplice of an untroubled and unhesitating matricide, who showed herself ever in passing to the intent and serious vision of Webster. By those candid and sensible judges to whom the praise of Marlowe seems to imply a reflection on the fame of Shakespeare, I may be accused—and by such critics I am content to be accused—of a fatuous design to set Webster beside Sophocles, or Sophocles—for aught I know—beneath Webster, if I venture to indicate the superiority in truth of natural passion—and, I must add, of moral instinct—which distinguishes the modern from the ancient. It is not, it never will be, and it never can have been natural for noble and civilised creatures to accept with spontaneous complacency, to discharge with unforced equanimity, such of the Sophoclean Orestes that the slaughter of a mother seems to be a less serious undertaking for his unreluctant hand than the subsequent execution

of her paramour. The immeasurable superiority of Æschylus to his successors in this quality of instinctive righteousness—if a word long vulgarised by theology may yet be used in its just and natural sense—is shared no less by Webster than by Shakespeare. The grave and deep truth of natural impulse is never ignored by these poets when dealing either with innocent or with criminal passion : but it surely is now and then ignored by the artistic quietism of Sophocles—as surely as it is outraged and degraded by the vulgar theatricalities of Euripides. Thomas Campbell was amused and scandalised by the fact that Webster (as he is pleased to express it) modestly compares himself to the playwright last mentioned ; being apparently of opinion that *Hippolytus* and *Medea* may be reckoned equal or superior, as works of tragic art or examples of ethical elevation, to *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfy* ; and being no less apparently ignorant, and incapable of understanding, that as there is no poet morally nobler than Webster so is there no poet ignobler in the moral sense than Euripides : while as a dramatic artist—an artist in character, action, and emotion—the degenerate tragedian of Athens, compared to the second tragic dramatist of England, is as a mutilated monkey to a well-made man. No better test of critical faculty could be required by the most exacting scrutiny of probation than is afforded by the critic's professed or professional estimate of those great poets whose names are not consecrated—or desecrated—by the conventional applause, the factitious adoration, of a tribunal whose judgments are dictated by obsequious superstition and unanimous incompetence. When certain critics inform a listening world that they do not admire Marlowe and Webster—they admire Shakespeare and Milton, we know at

once that it is not the genius of Shakespeare—it is the reputation of Shakespeare that they admire. It is not the man that they bow down to : it is the bust that they crouch down before. They would worship Shirley as soon as Shakespeare—Glover as soon as Milton—Byron as soon as Shelley—Ponsard as soon as Hugo—Longfellow as soon as Tennyson—if the tablet were as showily emblazoned, the inscription as pretentiously engraved.

The nobility of spirit and motive which is so distinguishing a mark of Webster's instinctive genius or natural disposition of mind is proved by his treatment of facts placed on record by contemporary annalists in the tragic story of Vittoria Accorambuoni, Duchess of Bracciano. That story would have been suggestive, if not tempting, to any dramatic poet : and almost any poet but Shakespeare or Webster would have been content to accept the characters and circumstances as they stood nakedly on record, and adapt them to the contemporary stage of England with such dexterity and intelligence as he might be able to command. But, as Shakespeare took the savage legend of Hamlet, the brutal story of Othello, and raised them from the respective levels of the *Heimskringla* and the Newgate Calendar to the very highest 'heaven of invention,' so has Webster transmuted the impressive but repulsive record of villainies and atrocities, in which he discovered the motive for a magnificent poem, into the majestic and pathetic masterpiece which is one of the most triumphant and the most memorable achievements of English poetry. If, in his play, as in the legal or historic account of the affair, the whole family of the heroine had appeared unanimous and eager in complicity with her sins and competition for a share in the profits of her dishonour, the tragedy

might still have been as effective as it is now from the theatrical or sensational point of view ; it might have thrilled the reader's nerves as keenly, have excited and stimulated his curiosity, have whetted and satiated his appetite for transient emotion, as thoroughly and triumphantly as now. But it would have been merely a criminal melodrama, compiled by the labour and vivified by the talent of an able theatrical journeyman. The one great follower of Shakespeare—‘ haud passibus æquis ’ at all points ; ‘ longo sed proximus intervallo ’—has recognised, with Shakespearean accuracy and delicacy and elevation of instinct, the necessity of ennobling and transfiguring his characters if their story was to be made acceptable to the sympathies of any but an idle or an ignoble audience. And he has done so after the very manner and in the very spirit of Shakespeare. The noble creatures of his invention give to the story that dignity and variety of interest without which the most powerful romance or drama can be but an example of vigorous vulgarity. The upright and high-minded mother and brother of the shameless Flamineo and the shame-stricken Vittoria refresh and purify the tragic atmosphere of the poem by the passing presence of their virtues. The shallow and fiery nature of the fair White Devil herself is a notable example of the difference so accurately distinguished by Charlotte Brontë between an impressionable and an impressible character. Ambition, self-interest, passion, remorse and hardihood alternate and contend in her impetuous and wayward spirit. The one distinct and trustworthy quality which may always be reckoned on is the indomitable courage underlying her easily irritable emotions. Her bearing at the trial for her husband’s murder is as dexterous and dauntless as the demeanour of Mary Stuart

before her judges. To Charles Lamb it seemed 'an innocence-resembling boldness'; to Mr. Dyce and Canon Kingsley the innocence displayed in Lamb's estimate seemed almost ludicrous in its misconception of Webster's text. I should hesitate to agree with them that he has never once made his accused heroine speak in the natural key of innocence unjustly impeached: Mary's pleading for her life is not at all points incompatible in tone with the innocence which it certainly fails to establish—except in minds already made up to accept any plea as valid which may plausibly or possibly be advanced on her behalf; and the arguments advanced by Vittoria are not more evasive and equivocal, in face of the patent and flagrant pre-possession of her judges, than those put forward by the Queen of Scots. It is impossible not to wonder whether the poet had not in his mind the actual tragedy which had taken place just twenty-five years before the publication of this play: if not, the coincidence is something more than singular. The fierce profligacy and savage egotism of Brachiano have a certain energy and activity in the display and the development of their motives and effects which suggest rather such a character as Bothwell's than such a character as that of the bloated and stolid sensualist of his life. As presented by Webster, he is doubtless an execrable ruffian: as presented by history, he would be intolerable by any but such readers or spectators of self-styled naturalism produce other than emetic emotions. Here again the noble instinct of the English poet has rectified the æsthetic unseemliness of an ignoble reality. This 'Brachiano' is a far more living figure than the porcine paramour of the historic

Accorambuoni. I am not prepared to maintain that in one scene too much has not been sacrificed to immediate vehemence of effect. The devotion of the discarded wife, who to shelter her Antony from the vengeance of Octavius assumes the mask of raging jealousy, thus taking upon herself the blame and responsibility of their final separation, is expressed with such consummate and artistic simplicity of power that on a first reading the genius of the dramatist may well blind us to the violent unlikelihood of the action. But this very extravagance of self-sacrifice may be thought by some to add a crowning touch of pathos to the unsurpassable beauty of the scene in which her child, after the murder of his mother, relates her past sufferings to his uncle. Those to whom the great name of Webster represents merely an artist in horrors, a ruffian of genius, may be recommended to study every line and syllable of this brief dialogue:

FRANCISCO. How now, my noble cousin ? what, in black ?

GIOVANNI. Yes, uncle, I was taught to imitate you
In virtue, and you [? now] must imitate me
In colours of your garments. My sweet mother
Is—

FRANCISCO. How ! where ?

GIOVANNI. Is there ; no, yonder : indeed, sir, I 'll not tell you,
For I shall make you weep.

FRANCISCO. Is dead ?

GIOVANNI. Do not blame me now,
I did not tell you so.

LODOVICO. She 's dead, my lord.

FRANCISCO. Dead !

MONTICELSO. Blest lady, thou art now above thy woes !

GIOVANNI. What do the dead do, uncle ? do they eat,
Hear music, go a hunting, and be merry,
As we that live ?

FRANCISCO. No, coz ; they sleep.

GIOVANNI.

Lord, Lord, that I were dead!
I have not slept these six nights.—When do they wake?

FRANCISCO. When God shall please.

GIOVANNI.

Good God, let her sleep ever!

For I have known her wake an hundred nights
When all the pillow where she laid her head
Was brine-wet with her tears. I am to complain to you, sir;
I'll tell you how they have used her now she's dead:
They wrapped her in a cruel fold of lead,
And would not let me kiss her.

FRANCISCO.

Thou didst love her.

GIOVANNI. I have often heard her say she gave me suck,
And it should seem by that she dearly loved me,
Since princes seldom do it.

FRANCISCO. O, all of my poor sister that remains!—
Take him away, for God's sake!

I must admit that I do not see how Shakespeare could have improved upon that. It seems to me that in any one of even his greatest tragedies this scene would have been remarkable among its most beautiful and perfect passages; nor, upon the whole, do I remember a third English poet who could be imagined capable of having written it. And it affords, I think, very clear and sufficient evidence that Webster could not have handled so pathetic and suggestive a subject as the execution of Lady Jane Grey and her young husband in a style so thin and feeble, so shallow in expression of pathos and so empty of suggestion or of passion, as that in which it is presented at the close of *Sir Thomas Wyatt*.

There is a perfect harmony of contrast between this and the death-scene of the boy's father: the agony of the murdered murderer is as superb in effect of terror as the sorrow of his son is exquisite in effect of pathos. Again we are reminded of Shakespeare, by no touch of imitation but simply by a note of kinship in genius and in style, at the

cry of Brachiano under the first sharp workings of the poison :

O thou strong heart !
There 's such a covenant 'tween the world and it,
They 're loth to break.

Another stroke well worthy of Shakespeare is the redeeming touch of grace in this brutal and cold-blooded ruffian which gives him in his agony a thought of tender care for the accomplice of his atrocities :

Do not kiss me, for I shall poison thee.

Few instances of Webster's genius are so well known as the brief but magnificent passage which follows ; yet it may not be impertinent to cite it once again :

BRACHIANO. O thou soft natural death, that art joint twin
To sweetest slumber ! no rough-bearded comet
Stares on thy mild departure ; the dull owl
Beats not against thy casement ; the hoarse wolf
Scents not thy carrion ; pity winds thy corpse,
Whilst horror waits on princes.

VITTORIA. I am lost for ever.

BRACHIANO. How miserable a thing it is to die
'Mongst women howling !—What are those ?

FLAMINEO. Franciscans :

They have brought the extreme unction.

BRACHIANO. On pain of death, let no man name death to me ;
It is a word [? most] infinitely terrible.

The very tremor of moral and physical abjection from nervous defiance into prostrate fear which seems to pant and bluster and quail and subside in the natural cadence of these lines would suffice to prove the greatness of the artist who could express it with such terrible perfection : but when we compare it, by collation of the two scenes, with the deep simplicity of tenderness, the childlike accuracy of innocent emotion, in

the passage previously cited, it seems to me that we must admit, as an unquestionable truth, that in the deepest and highest and purest qualities of tragic poetry Webster stands nearer to Shakespeare than any other English poet stands to Webster; and so much nearer as to be a good second; while it is at least questionable whether even Shelley can reasonably be accepted as a good third. Not one among the predecessors, contemporaries, or successors of Shakespeare and Webster has given proof of this double faculty—this coequal mastery of terror and pity, undiscoloured and undistorted, but vivified and glorified by the splendour of immediate and infallible imagination. The most grovelling realism could scarcely be so impudent in stupidity as to pretend an aim at more perfect presentation of truth: the most fervent fancy, the most sensitive taste, could hardly dream of a desire for more exquisite expression of natural passion in a form of utterance more naturally exalted and refined.

In all the vast and voluminous records of critical error there can be discovered no falsehood more foolish or more flagrant than the vulgar tradition which represents this high-souled and gentle-hearted poet as one morbidly fascinated by a fantastic attraction towards the ‘violent delights’ of horror and the nervous or sensational excitements of criminal detail; nor can there be conceived a more perverse or futile misapprehension than that which represents John Webster as one whose instinct led him by some obscure and oblique propensity to darken the darkness of southern crime or vice by an infusion of northern seriousness, of introspective cynicism and reflective intensity in wrongdoing, into the easy levity and infantile simplicity of spontaneous wickedness which distinguished the moral and social corruption

of renascent Italy. Proof enough of this has already been adduced to make any protestation or appeal against such an estimate as preposterous in its superfluity as the misconception just mentioned is preposterous in its perversity. The great if not incomparable power displayed in Webster's delineation of such criminals as Flamineo and Bosola—Bonapartes in the bud, Napoleons in a nutshell, Cæsars who have missed their Rubicon and collapse into the likeness of a Catiline—is a sign rather of his noble English loathing for the traditions associated with such names as Cæsar and Medici and Borgia, Catiline and Iscariot and Napoleon, than of any sympathetic interest in such incarnations of historic crime. Flamineo especially, the ardent pimp, the enthusiastic pander, who prostitutes his sister and assassinates his brother with such earnest and single-hearted devotion to his own straightforward self-interest, has in him a sublime fervour of rascality which recalls rather the man of Brumaire and of Waterloo than the man of December and of Sedan. He has something too of Napoleon's ruffianly good-humour—the frankness of a thieves' kitchen or an imperial court, when the last thin fig-leaf of pretence has been plucked off and crumpled up and flung away. We can imagine him pinching his favourites by the ear and dictating memorials of mendacity with the self-possession of a self-made monarch. As it is, we see him only in the stage of parasite and pimp—more like the hired husband of a cast-off Creole than the resplendent rogue who fascinated even history for a time by the clamour and glitter of his triumphs. But the fellow is unmistakably an emperor in the egg—so dauntless and frontless in the very abjection of his villainy that we feel him to have been defrauded by mischance of the only

two destinations appropriate for the close of his career — a gibbet or a throne.

This imperial quality of ultimate perfection in egotism and crowning complacency in crime is wanting to his brother in atrocity, the most notable villain who figures on the stage of Webster's latest masterpiece. Bosola is not quite a possible Bonaparte ; he is not even on a level with the bloody hirelings who execute the orders of tyranny and treason with the perfunctory atrocity of Anicetus or Saint-Arnaud. There is not, or I am much mistaken, a touch of imaginative poetry in the part of Flamineo : his passion, excitable on occasion and vehement enough, is as prosaic in its homely and cynical eloquence as the most fervent emotions of a Napoleon or an Iago when warmed or goaded into elocution. The one is a human snake, the other is a human wolf. Webster could not with equal propriety have put into the mouth of Flamineo such magnificent lyric poetry as seems to fall naturally, however suddenly and strangely, from the bitter and bloodthirsty tongue of Bosola. To him, as to the baffled and incoherent ruffian Romelio in the contemporary play of *The Devil's Law-case*, his creator has assigned the utterance of such verse as can only be compared to that uttered by Cornelia over the body of her murdered son in the tragedy to which I have just given so feeble and inadequate a word of tribute. In his command and in his use of the metre first made fashionable by the graceful improvisations of Greene, Webster seems to me as original and as peculiar as in his grasp and manipulation of character and event. All other poets, Shakespeare no less than Barnfield, and Milton no less than Wither, have used this lyric instrument for none but gentle or gracious ends : Webster has breathed into it the power to express

a sublimer and a profounder tone of emotion ; he has given it the cadence and the colour of tragedy ; he has touched and transfigured its note of meditative music into a chord of passionate austerity and prophetic awe. This was the key in which all previous poets had played upon the metre which Webster was to put to so deeply different an use.

Walking in a valley greene,
Spred with Flora summer queene :
Where shee heaping all hir graces,
Niggard seem'd in other places :
Spring it was, and here did spring
All that nature forth can bring.

(*Tullies Loue*, p. 53, ed. 1589.)

Nights were short, and daies were long ;
Blossoms on the Hawthorns hung :
Philomel (Night-Musiques King)
Tolde the comming of the spring.

(*Grosart's Barnfield* [1876], p. 97.)

On a day (alack the day !)
Love, whose month is ever May,
Spied a blossom passing fair
Playing in the wanton air.

(*Love's Labour 's Lost*, Act. iv. Sc. iii.)

And now let us hear Webster :

Hearke, now every thing is still,
The Scrutch-Owle, and the whistler shrill,
Call upon our Dame, aloud,
And bid her quickly don her shrowd :
Much you had of Land and rent,
Your length in clay 's now competent.
A long war disturb'd your minde,
Here your perfect peace is sign'd.
Of what is 't, fooles make such vaine keeping ?
Sin their conception, their birth, weeping :
Their life, a generall mist of error,
Their death, a hideous storme of terror.

Strew your haire with powders sweete :
 Don cleane linnen, bath[e] your feete,
 And (the foule feend more to checke)
 A crucifixe let blesse your necke :
 'Tis now full tide 'tweene night and day,
 End your groane, and come away.

(*The Tragedy of the Dutchesse of Malfy* : 1623 : sig. K, K 2.)

The toll of the funereal rhythm, the heavy chime of the solemn and simple verse, the mournful menace and the brooding presage of its note, are but the covering, as it were, or the outer expression, of the tragic significance which deepens and quickens and kindles to its close. Æschylus and Dante have never excelled, nor perhaps have Sophocles and Shakespeare ever equalled in impression of terrible effect, the fancy of bidding a live woman array herself in the raiment of the grave, and do for her own living body the offices done for a corpse by the ministers attendant on the dead.

The murderous humourist whose cynical inspiration gives life to these deadly lines is at first sight a less plausible, but on second thoughts may perhaps seem no less possible a character than Flamineo. Pure and simple ambition of the Napoleonic order is the motive which impels into infamy the aspiring parasite of Brachiano : a savage melancholy inflames the baffled greed of Bosola to a pitch of wickedness not unqualified by relenting touches of profitless remorse, which come always either too early or too late to bear any serviceable fruit of compassion or redemption. There is no deeper or more Shakespearean stroke of tragic humour in all Webster's writings than that conveyed in the scornful and acute reply—almost too acute perhaps for the character—of Bosola's remorseless patron to the remonstrance or appeal of

his instrument against the insatiable excess and persistence of his cruelty : ' Thy pity is nothing akin to thee.' He has more in common with Romelio in *The Devil's Law-case*, an assassin who misses his aim and flounders into penitence much as that uncomfortable drama misses its point and stumbles into vacuity : and whose unsatisfactory figure looks either like a crude and unsuccessful study for that of Bosola, or a disproportioned and emasculated copy from it. But to him too Webster has given the fitful force of fancy or inspiration which finds expression in such sudden snatches of funereal verse as this :

How then can any monument say
' Here rest these bones till the last day,'
When Time, swift both of foot and feather,
May bear them the sexton kens not whither ?
What care I, then, though my last sleep
Be in the desert or the deep,
No lamp nor taper, day and night,
To give my charnel chargeable light ?
I have there like quantity of ground,
And at the last day I shall be found.

The villainous laxity of versification which deforms the grim and sardonic beauty of these occasionally rough and halting lines is perceptible here and there in *The Duchess of Malfy*, but comes to its head in *The Devil's Law-case*. It cannot, I fear, be denied that Webster was the first to relax those natural bonds of noble metre ' whose service is perfect freedom '—as Shakespeare found it, and combined with perfect loyalty to its law the most perfect liberty of living and sublime and spontaneous and accurate expression. I can only conjecture that this greatest of the Shakespeareans was misguided out of his natural line of writing as exemplified and perfected in the tragedy

of Vittoria, and lured into this cross and crooked byway of immetrical experiment, by the temptation of some theory or crotchet on the score of what is now called naturalism or realism ; which, if there were any real or natural weight in the reasoning that seeks to support it, would of course do away, and of course ought to do away, with dramatic poetry altogether : for if it is certain that real persons do not actually converse in good metre, it is happily no less certain that they do not actually converse in bad metre. In the hands of so great a tragic poet as Webster a peculiar and impressive effect may now and then be produced by this anomalous and illegitimate way of writing ; it certainly suits well with the thoughtful and fantastic truculence of Bosola's reflections on death and dissolution and decay—his 'talk fit for a charnel,' which halts and hovers between things hideous and things sublime. But it is a step on the downward way that leads to the negation or the confusion of all distinctions between poetry and prose : a result to which it would be grievous to think that the example of Shakespeare's greatest contemporary should in any way appear to conduce.

The doctrine or the motive of chance (whichever we may prefer to call it) is seen in its fullest workings and felt in its furthest bearings by the student of Webster's masterpiece. The fifth act of *The Duchess of Malfy* has been assailed on the very ground which it should have been evident to a thoughtful and capable reader that the writer must have intended to take up —on the ground that the whole upshot of the story is dominated by sheer chance, arranged by mere error, and guided by pure accident. No formal scheme or religious principle of retribution would have been so strangely or so thoroughly in keeping with the whole

scheme and principle of the tragedy. After the overwhelming terrors and the overpowering beauties of that unique and marvellous fourth act, in which the genius of this poet spreads its fullest and its darkest wing for the longest and the strongest of its flights, it could not but be that the subsequent action and passion of the drama should appear by comparison unimpressive or ineffectual ; but all the effect or impression possible of attainment under the inevitable burden of this difficulty is achieved by natural and simple and straightforward means. If Webster has not made the part of Antonio dramatically striking and attractive—as he probably found it impossible to do—he has at least bestowed on the fugitive and unconscious widower of his murdered heroine a pensive and manly grace of deliberate resignation which is not without pathetic as well as poetical effect. In the beautiful and well-known scene where the echo from his wife's unknown and new-made grave seems to respond to his meditative mockery and forewarn him of his impending death, Webster has given such reality and seriousness to an old commonplace of contemporary fancy or previous fashion in poetry that we are fain to forget the fantastic side of the conception and see only the tragic aspect of its meaning. A weightier objection than any which can be brought against the conduct of the play might be suggested to the minds of some readers—and these, perhaps, not too exacting or too captious readers—by the sudden vehemence of transformation which in the great preceding act seems to fall like fire from heaven upon the two chief criminals who figure on the stage of murder. It seems rather a miraculous retribution, a judicial violation of the laws of nature, than a reasonably credible consequence or evolution

of those laws, which strikes Ferdinand with madness and Bosola with repentance. But the whole atmosphere of the action is so charged with thunder that this double and simultaneous shock of moral electricity rather thrills us with admiration and faith than chills us with repulsion or distrust. The passionate intensity and moral ardour of imagination which we feel to vibrate and penetrate through every turn and every phrase of the dialogue would suffice to enforce upon our belief a more nearly incredible revolution of nature or revulsion of the soul.

It is so difficult for even the very greatest poets to give any vivid force of living interest to a figure of passive endurance that perhaps the only instance of perfect triumph over this difficulty is to be found in the character of Desdemona. Shakespeare alone could have made her as interesting as Imogen or Cordelia ; though these have so much to do and dare, and she after her first appearance has simply to suffer : even Webster could not give such individual vigour of characteristic life to the figure of his martyr as to the figure of his criminal heroine. Her courage and sweetness, her delicacy and sincerity, her patience and her passion, are painted with equal power and tenderness of touch : yet she hardly stands before us as distinct from others of her half-angelic sisterhood as does the White Devil from the fellowship of her comrades in perdition. But if, as we may assuredly assume, it was on the twenty-third 'nouell' of William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* that Webster's crowning masterpiece was founded, the poet's moral and spiritual power of transfiguration is here even more admirable than in the previous case of his other and wellnigh coequally consummate poem. The narrative degrades and brutalises the widowed heroine's

affection for her second husband to the actual level of the vile conception which the poet attributes and confines to the foul imagination of her envious and murderous brothers. Here again, and finally and supremely here, the purifying and exalting power of Webster's noble and magnanimous imagination is gloriously unmistakable by all and any who have eyes to read and hearts to recognise.

For it is only with Shakespeare that Webster can ever be compared in any way to his disadvantage as a tragic poet : above all others of his country he stands indisputably supreme. The place of Marlowe indeed is higher among our poets by right of his primacy as a founder and a pioneer : but of course his work has not—as of course it could not have—that plenitude and perfection of dramatic power in construction and dramatic subtlety in detail which the tragedies of Webster share in so large a measure with the tragedies of Shakespeare. Marston, the poet with whom he has most in common, might almost be said to stand in the same relation to Webster as Webster to Shakespeare. In single lines and phrases, in a few detached passages and a very few distinguishable scenes, he is worthy to be compared with the greater poet ; he suddenly rises and dilates to the stature and the strength of a model whom usually he can but follow afar off. Marston, as a tragic poet, is not quite what Webster would be if his fame depended simply on such scenes as those in which the noble mother of Vittoria breaks off her daughter's first interview with Brachiano—spares, and commends to God's forgiveness, the son who has murdered his brother before her eyes—and lastly appears ‘in several forms of distraction,’ ‘grown a very old woman in two hours,’ and singing that most pathetic and imaginative of all funereal

invocations which the finest critic of all time so justly and so delicately compared to the watery dirge of Ariel. There is less refinement, less exaltation and perfection of feeling, less tenderness of emotion and less nobility of passion, but hardly less force and fervour, less weighty and sonorous ardour of expression, in the very best and loftiest passages of Marston : but his genius is more uncertain, more fitful and intermittent, less harmonious, coherent, and trustworthy than Webster's. And Webster, notwithstanding an occasional outbreak into Aristophanic license of momentary sarcasm through the sardonic lips of such a cynical ruffian as Ferdinand or Flamineo, is without exception the cleanliest, as Marston is beyond comparison the coarsest writer of his time. In this as in other matters of possible comparison that 'vessel of deathless wrath,' the implacable and inconsolable poet of sympathy half maddened into rage and aspiration goaded backwards to despair—it should be needless to add the name of Cyril Tourneur—stands midway between these two more conspicuous figures of their age. But neither the father and master of poetic pessimists, the splendid and sombre creator of Vindice and his victims, nor any other third whom our admiration may discern among all the greatest of their fellows, can be compared with Webster on terms more nearly equal than those on which Webster stands in relation to the sovereign of them all.

THOMAS DEKKER

OF all English poets, if not of all poets on record, Dekker is perhaps the most difficult to classify. The grace and delicacy, the sweetness and spontaneity of his genius are not more obvious and undeniable than the many defects which impair and the crowning deficiency which degrades it. As long, but so long only, as a man retains some due degree of self-respect and respect for the art he serves or the business he follows, it matters less for his fame in the future than for his prosperity in the present whether he retains or discards any vestige of respect for any other obligation in the world. François Villon, compared with whom all other reckless and disreputable men of genius seem patterns of austere decency and elevated regularity of life, was as conscientious and self-respectful an artist as a Virgil or a Tennyson : he is not a great poet only, but one of the most blameless, the most perfect, the most faultless among his fellows in the first class of writers for all time. If not in that class, yet high in the class immediately beneath it, the world would long since have agreed to enrol the name of Thomas Dekker, had he not wanted that one gift which next to genius is the most indispensable for all aspirants to a station among the masters of creative literature. For he was by nature at once a singer and a maker : he had the gift of native music and the birthright of inborn invention. His song was often sweet as honey ; his fancy sometimes as rich and subtle, his imagination as delicate and strong, as that

of the very greatest among dramatists or poets. For gentle grace of inspiration and vivid force of realism he is eclipsed at his very best by Shakespeare's self alone. No such combination or alternation of such admirable powers is discernible in any of his otherwise more splendid or sublime compeers. And in one gift, the divine gift of tenderness, he comes nearer to Shakespeare and stands higher above others than in any other quality of kindred genius.

And with all these gifts, if the vulgar verdict of his own day and of later days be not less valid than vulgar, he was a failure. There is a pathetic undertone of patience and resignation not unqualified by manly though submissive regret, which recurs now and then, or seems to recur, in the personal accent of his subdued and dignified appeal to the casual reader, suggestive of a sense that the higher triumphs of art, the brighter prosperities of achievement, were not reserved for him ; and yet not unsuggestive of a consciousness that, if this be so, it is not so through want of the primal and essential qualities of a poet. For, as Lamb says, Dekker 'had poetry enough for anything' ; at all events, for anything which can be accomplished by a poet endowed in the highest degree with the gifts of graceful and melodious fancy, tender and cordial humour, vivid and pathetic realism, a spontaneous refinement and an exquisite simplicity of expression. With the one great gift of seriousness, of noble ambition, of self-confidence rooted in self-respect, he must have won an indisputable instead of a questionable place among the immortal writers of his age. But this gift had been so absolutely withheld from him by nature or withdrawn from him by circumstance that he has left us not one single work altogether worthy of the powers now revealed and now

eclipsed, now suddenly radiant and now utterly extinct, in the various and voluminous array of his writings. Although his earlier plays are in every way superior to his later, there is evidence even in the best of them of the author's infirmity of hand. From the first he shows himself idly or perversely or impotently prone to loosen his hold on character and story alike before his plot can be duly carried out or his conceptions adequately developed. His 'pleasant Comedie of *The Gentle Craft*,' first printed three years before the death of Queen Elizabeth, is one of his brightest and most coherent pieces of work, graceful and lively throughout, if rather thin-spun and slight of structure : but the more serious and romantic part of the action is more lightly handled than the broad light comedy of the mad and merry Lord Mayor Simon Eyre, a figure in the main original and humorous enough, but somewhat over persistent in ostentation and repetition of jocose catchwords after the fashion of mine host of the Garter ; a type which Shakespeare knew better than to repeat, but of which his inferiors seem to have been enamoured beyond all reason. In this fresh and pleasant little play there are few or no signs of the author's higher poetic abilities : the style is pure and sweet, simple and spontaneous, without any hint of a quality not required by the subject : but in the other play of Dekker's which bears the same date as this one his finest and rarest gifts of imagination and emotion, feeling and fancy, colour and melody, are as apparent as his ingrained faults of levity and laziness. The famous passage in which Webster couples together the names of 'Mr. Shakespeare, Mr. Dekker, and Mr. Heywood,' seems explicable when we compare the style of *Old Fortunatus* with the style of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Dekker

had as much of the peculiar sweetness, the gentle fancy, the simple melody of Shakespeare in his woodland dress, as Heywood of the homely and noble realism, the heartiness and humour, the sturdy sympathy and joyful pride of Shakespeare in his most English mood of patriotic and historic loyalty. Note that these qualities are wanting in the work of Dekker: he was an ardent and a combative patriot, ever ready to take up the cudgels in prose or rhyme for England and her yeomen against Popery and the world: but it is rather the man than the poet who speaks on these occasions: his singing faculty does not apply itself so naturally to such work as to the wild wood-notes of passion and fancy and pathos which in his happiest moments, even when they remind us of Shakespeare's, provoke no sense of unworthiness or inequality in comparison with these. It is not with the most popular and famous names of his age that the sovereign name of Shakespeare is most properly or most profitably to be compared. His genius has really far less in common with that of Jonson or of Fletcher than with that of Webster or of Dekker. To the last-named poet even Lamb was for once less than just when he said of the 'frantic Lover' in *Old Fortunatus* that 'he talks pure Biron and Romeo; he is almost as poetical as they.' The word 'almost' should be supplanted by the word 'fully'; and the criticism would then be no less adequate than apt. Sidney himself might have applauded the verses which clothe with living music a passion as fervent and as fiery a fancy as his own. Not even in the rapturous melodies of that matchless series of songs and sonnets which glorify the inseparable names of Astrophel and Stella will the fascinated student find a passage more enchanting than this:

Thou art a traitor to that white and red
 Which sitting on her cheeks (being Cupid's throne)
 Is my heart's sovereign : O, when she is dead,
 This wonder, Beauty, shall be found in none.
 Now Agripyne's not mine, I vow to be
 In love with nothing but deformity.
 O fair Deformity, I muse all eyes
 Are not enamoured of thee : thou didst never
 Murder men's hearts, or let them pine like wax,
 Melting against the sun of thy disdain ;¹
 Thou art a faithful nurse to Chastity ;
 Thy beauty is not like to Agripyne's,
 For cares, and age, and sickness, hers deface,
 But thine's eternal : O Deformity,
 Thy fairness is not like to Agripyne's,
 For, dead, her beauty will no beauty have,
 But thy face looks most lovely in the grave.

Shakespeare has nothing more exquisite in expression of passionate fancy, more earnest in emotion, more spontaneous in simplicity, more perfect in romantic inspiration. But the poet's besetting sin of laxity, his want of seriousness and steadiness, his idle, shambling, shifty way of writing, had power even then, in the very prime of his promise, to impede his progress and impair his chance of winning the race which he had set himself—and yet which he had hardly set himself—to run. And if these things were done in the green tree, it was only too obvious what would be done in the dry ; it must have been clear that this golden-tongued and gentle-hearted poet had not strength of spirit or fervour of ambition enough to put conscience into his work and resolution into his fancies. But even from such headlong recklessness as he had already displayed no reader could have

¹ As even Lamb allowed the meaningless and immetrical word ' destiny ' to stand at the end of this line in place of the obviously right reading, it is not wonderful that all later editors of this passage should hitherto have done so.

anticipated so singular a defiance of all form and order, all coherence and proportion, as is exhibited in his *Satiromastix*. The controversial part of the play is so utterly alien from the romantic part that it is impossible to regard them as component factors of the same original plot. It seems to me unquestionable that Dekker must have conceived the design, and probable that he must have begun the composition, of a serious play on the subject of William Rufus and Sir Walter Tyrrel, before the appearance of Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* impelled or instigated him to some immediate attempt at rejoinder ; and that being in a feverish hurry to retort the blow inflicted on him by a heavier hand than his own he devised—perhaps between jest and earnest—the preposterously incoherent plan of piecing out his farcical and satirical design by patching and stitching it into his unfinished scheme of tragedy. It may be assumed, and it is much to be hoped, that there never existed another poet capable of imagining—much less of perpetrating—an incongruity so monstrous and so perverse. The explanation so happily suggested by a modern critic that William Rufus is meant for Shakespeare, and that 'Lylly is Sir Vaughan ap Rees,' wants only a little further development, on the principle of analogy, to commend itself to every scholar. It is equally obvious that the low-bred and foul-mouthed ruffian Captain Tucca must be meant for Sir Philip Sidney ; the vulgar idiot Asinius Bubo for Lord Bacon ; the half-witted underling Peter Flash for Sir Walter Raleigh ; and the immaculate Celestina, who escapes by stratagem and force of virtue from the villainous designs of Shakespeare, for the lady long since indicated by the perspicacity of a Chalmers as the object of that lawless and desperate passion which found utterance in the sonnets of her unprincipled

admirer—Queen Elizabeth. As a previous suggestion of my own, to the effect that George Peele was probably the real author of *Romeo and Juliet*, has had the singular good fortune to be not merely adopted but appropriated—in serious earnest—by a contemporary student, without—as far as I am aware—a syllable of acknowledgment, I cannot but anticipate a similar acceptance in similar quarters for the modest effort at interpretation now submitted to the judgment of the ingenuous reader.

Gifford is not too severe on the palpable incongruities of Dekker's preposterous medley: but his impeachment of Dekker as a more virulent and intemperate controversialist than Jonson is not less preposterous than the structure of this play. The nobly gentle and manly verses in which the less fortunate and distinguished poet disclaims and refutes the imputation of envy or malevolence excited by the favour enjoyed by his rival in high quarters should have sufficed, in common justice, to protect him from such a charge. There is not a word in Jonson's satire expressive of anything but savage and unqualified scorn for his humbler antagonist: and the tribute paid by that antagonist to his genius, the appeal to his better nature which concludes the torrent of recrimination, would have won some word of honourable recognition from any but the most unscrupulous and ungenerous of partisans. That Dekker was unable to hold his own against Jonson when it came to sheer hard hitting—that on the ground or platform of personal satire he was as a light weight pitted against a heavy weight—is of course too plain, from the very first round, to require any further demonstration. But it is not less plain that in delicacy and simplicity and sweetness of inspiration the poet who could write

the scene in which the bride takes poison (as she believes) from the hand of her father, in presence of her bridegroom, as a refuge from the passion of the king, was as far above Jonson as Jonson was above him in the robuster qualities of intellect or genius. This most lovely scene, for pathos tempered with fancy and for passion distilled in melody, is comparable only with higher work, of rarer composition and poetry more pure, than Jonson's : it is a very treasure-house of verses like jewels, bright as tears and sweet as flowers. When Dekker writes like this, then truly we seem to see his right hand in the left hand of Shakespeare.

To find the names of Ben Jonson and Thomas Dekker amicably associated in the composition of a joint poem or pageant within the space of a year from the publication of so violent a retort by the latter to so vehement an attack by the former must amuse if it does not astonish the reader least capable of surprise at the boyish readiness to quarrel and the boyish readiness to shake hands which would seem to be implied in so startling a change of relations. In all the huge, costly, wearisome, barbaric and pedantic ceremonial which welcomed into London the Solomon of Scotland, the exhausted student who attempts to follow the ponderous elaboration of report drawn up by these reconciled enemies will remark the solid and sedate merit of Jonson's best couplets with less pleasure than he will receive from the quaint sweetness of Dekker's lyric notes. Admirable as are many of Ben Jonson's songs for their finish of style and fullness of matter, it is impossible for those who know what is or should be the special aim or the distinctive quality of lyric verse to place him in the first class—much less, in the front rank—of lyric poets. He is at his best

a good way ahead of such song-writers as Byron ; but Dekker at his best belongs to the order of such song-writers as Blake or Shelley. Perhaps the very finest example of his flawless and delicate simplicity of excellence in this field of work may be the well-known song in honour of honest poverty and in praise of honest labour which so gracefully introduces the heroine of a play published in this same year of the accession of James—*Patient Grissel* ; a romantic tragic-comedy so attractive for its sweetness and lightness of tone and touch that no reader will question the judgment or condemn the daring of the poets who ventured upon ground where Chaucer had gone before them with such gentle stateliness of step and such winning tenderness of gesture. His deepest note of pathos they have not even attempted to reproduce : but in freshness and straightforwardness, in frankness and simplicity of treatment, the dramatic version is not generally unworthy to be compared with the narrative which it follows afar off.¹ Chettle and Haughton, the associates of Dekker in this enterprise, had each of them something of their colleague's finer qualities ; but the best scenes in the play remind me rather of Dekker's best early work than of *Robert Earl of Huntington* or of *Englishmen for my Money*. So much has been said of the evil influence of Italian example upon English character in the age of Elizabeth, and so much has been made of such confessions or imputations as distinguish the clamorous and

¹ I may here suggest a slight emendation in the text of the spirited and graceful scene with which this play opens. The original reads :

So fares it with coy dames, who, great with scorn,
Shew the care-pinèd hearts that sue to them.

The word *Shew* is an obvious misprint—but more probably, I venture to think, for the word *Shun* than for the word *Fly*, which is substituted by Mr. Collier and accepted by Dr. Grosart.

malevolent penitence of Robert Greene, that it is more than agreeable to find at least one dramatic poet of the time who has the manliness to enter a frank and contemptuous protest against this habit of malignant self-excuse. ‘Italy,’ says an honest gentleman in this comedy to a lying and impudent gull, ‘Italy infects you not, but your own diseased spirits. Italy? Out, you froth, you scum! because your soul is mud, and that you have breathed in Italy, you ’ll say Italy has defiled you: away, you boar: thou wilt wallow in mire in the sweetest country in the world.’

There are many traces of moral or spiritual weakness and infirmity in the writings of Dekker and the scattered records or indications of his unprosperous though not unlaborious career: but there are manifest and manifold signs of an honest and earnest regard for justice and fair dealing, as well as of an inexhaustible compassion for suffering, an indestructible persistency of pity, which found characteristic expression in the most celebrated of his plays. There is a great gulf between it and the first of Victor Hugo’s tragedies: yet the instinct of either poet is the same, as surely as their common motive is the redemption of a fallen woman by the influence of twinborn love and shame. Of all Dekker’s works, *The Honest Whore* comes nearest to some reasonable degree of unity and harmony in conception and construction; his besetting vice of reckless and sluttish incoherence has here done less than usual to deform the proportions and deface the impression of his design. Indeed, the connection of the two serious plots in the first part is a rare example of dexterous and happy simplicity in composition: the comic underplot of the patient man and shrewish wife is more loosely attached by a slighter thread of relation to these two main stories, but is so

amusing in its light and facile play of inventive merriment and harmless mischief as to need no further excuse. Such an excuse, however, might otherwise be found in the plea that it gives occasion for the most beautiful, the most serious, and the most famous passage in all the writings of its author. The first scene of this first part has always appeared to me one of the most effective and impressive on our stage : the interruption of the mock funeral by the one true mourner whose passion it was intended to deceive into despair is so striking as a mere incident or theatrical device that the noble and simple style in which the graver part of the dialogue is written can be no more than worthy of the subject : whereas in other plays of Dekker's the style is too often beneath the merit of the subject, and the subject as often below the value of the style. The subsequent revival of Infelice from her trance is represented with such vivid and delicate power that the scene, short and simple as it is, is one of the most fascinating in any play of the period. In none of these higher and finer parts of the poem can I trace the touch of any other hand than the principal author's : but the shopkeeping scenes of the underplot have at least as much of Middleton's usual quality as of Dekker's ; homely and rough-cast as they are, there is a certain finish or thoroughness about them which is more like the careful realism of the former than the slovenly naturalism of the latter. The coarse commonplaces of the sermon on prostitution by which Bellafront is so readily and surprisingly reclaimed into respectability give sufficient and superfluous proof that Dekker had nothing of the severe and fiery inspiration which makes a great satirist or a great preacher ; but when we pass again into a sweeter air than that of the boudoir or the pulpit, it is the unmistakable

note of Dekker's most fervent and tender mood of melody which enchant us in such verses as these, spoken by a lover musing on the portrait of a mistress whose coffin has been borne before him to the semblance of a grave :

Of all the roses grafted on her cheeks,
Of all the graces dancing in her eyes,
Of all the music set upon her tongue,
Of all that was past woman's excellence
In her white bosom, look, a painted board
Circumscribes all !

Is there any other literature, we are tempted to ask ourselves, in which the writer of these lines, and of many as sweet and perfect in their inspired simplicity as these, would be rated no higher among his countrymen than Thomas Dekker ?

From the indisputable fact of Middleton's partnership in this play, Mr. Dyce was induced to assume the very questionable inference of his partnership in the sequel which was licensed for acting five years later. To me this second part seems so thoroughly of one piece and one pattern, so apparently the result of one man's invention and composition, that without more positive evidence I should hesitate to assign a share in it to any colleague of the poet under whose name it first appeared. There are far fewer scenes or passages in this than in the preceding play which suggest or present themselves for quotation or selection : the tender and splendid and pensive touches of pathetic or imaginative poetry which we find in the first part, we shall be disappointed if we seek in the second : its incomparable claim on our attention is the fact that it contains the single character in all the voluminous and miscellaneous works of Dekker which gives its creator an indisputable right to a place of perpetual

honour among the imaginative humourists of England, and therefore among the memorable artists and creative workmen of the world. Apart from their claim to remembrance as poets and dramatists of more or less artistic and executive capacity, Dekker and Middleton are each of them worthy to be remembered as the inventor or discoverer of a wholly original, interesting, and natural type of character, as essentially inimitable as it is undeniably unimitated : the savage humour and cynic passion of De Flores, the genial passion and tender humour of Orlando Friscobaldo, are equally lifelike in the truthfulness and completeness of their distinct and vivid presentation. The merit of the play in which the character last named is a leading figure consists mainly or almost wholly in the presentation of the three principal persons : the reclaimed harlot, now the faithful and patient wife of her first seducer ; the broken-down, ruffianly, light-hearted and light-headed libertine who has married her ; and the devoted old father who watches in the disguise of a servant over the changes of her fortune, the sufferings, risks, and temptations which try the purity of her penitence and confirm the fortitude of her constancy. Of these three characters I cannot but think that any dramatist who ever lived might have felt that he had reason to be proud. It is strange that Charles Lamb, to whom of all critics and all men the pathetic and humorous charm of the old man's personality might most confidently have been expected most cordially to appeal, should have left to Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt the honour of doing justice to so beautiful a creation—the crowning evidence to the greatness of Dekker's gifts, his power of moral imagination and his delicacy of dramatic execution. From the first to the last word of his part

the quaint sweet humour of the character is sustained with an instinctive skill which would do honour to a far more careful and a far more famous artist than Dekker. The words with which he receives the false news of his fallen daughter's death ; ' Dead ? my last and best peace go with her ! '—those which he murmurs to himself on seeing her again after seventeen years of estrangement ; ' The mother's own face, I ha' not forgot that '—prepare the way for the admirable final scene in which his mask of anger drops off, and his ostentation of obduracy relaxes into tenderness and tears. ' Dost thou beg for him, thou precious man's meat, thou ? has he not beaten thee, kicked thee, trod on thee ? and dost thou fawn on him like his spaniel ? has he not pawned thee to thy petticoat, sold thee to thy smock, made ye leap at a crust : yet wouldest have me save him ?—What, dost thou hold him ? let go his hand : if thou dost not forsake him, a father's everlasting blessing fall upon both your heads ! ' The fusion of humour with pathos into perfection of exquisite accuracy in expression which must be recognised at once and remembered for ever by any competent reader of this scene is the highest quality of Dekker as a writer of prose, and is here displayed at its highest : the more poetic or romantic quality of his genius had already begun to fade out when this second part of his finest poem was written. Hazlitt has praised the originality, dexterity, and vivacity of the effect produced by the stratagem which Infelice employs for the humiliation of her husband, when by accusing herself of imaginary infidelity under the most incredibly degrading conditions she entraps him into gratuitous fury and turns the tables on him by the production of evidence against himself ; and the scene is no doubt theatrically effective : but the

grace and delicacy of the character are sacrificed to this comparatively unworthy consideration : the pure, high-minded, noble-hearted lady, whose loyal and passionate affection was so simply and so attractively displayed in the first part of her story, is so lamentably humiliated by the cunning and daring immodesty of such a device that we hardly feel it so revolting an incongruity as it should have been to see this princess enjoying, in common with her father and her husband, the spectacle of imprisoned harlots on penitential parade in the Bridewell of Milan ; a thoroughly Hogarthian scene in the grim and vivid realism of its tragicomic humour.

But if the poetic and realistic merits of these two plays make us understand why Webster should have coupled its author with the author of *Twelfth Night* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the demerits of the two plays next published under his single name are so grave, so gross, so manifold, that the writer seems unworthy to be coupled as a dramatist with a journeyman poet so far superior to him in honest thoroughness and smoothness of workmanship as, even at his very hastiest and crudest, was Thomas Heywood. In style and versification the patriotic and anti-Catholic drama which bears the Protestant and apocalyptic title of *The Whore of Babylon* is still, upon the whole, very tolerably spirited and fluent, with gleams of fugitive poetry and glimpses of animated action ; but the construction is ponderous and puerile, the declamation vacuous and vehement. An Æschylus alone could have given us, in a tragedy on the subject of the Salamis of England, a fit companion to the *Persæ* ; which, as Shakespeare let the chance pass by him, remains alone for ever in the incomparable glory of its triumphant and sublime perfection. Marlowe

perhaps might have made something of it, though the task would have taxed his energies to the utmost, and overtaxed the utmost of his skill ; Dekker could make nothing. The empress of Babylon is but a poor slipshod ragged prostitute in the hands of this poetic beadle : ‘ non ragioniam di lei, ma guarda e passa.’

Of the three plays in which Dekker took part with Webster, the two plays in which he took part with Ford, and the second play in which he took part with Middleton, I have spoken respectively in my several essays on those other three poets. The next play which bears his name alone was published five years later than the political or historical sketch or study which we have just dismissed ; and which, compared with it, is a tolerable if not a creditable piece of work. It is difficult to abstain from intemperate language in speaking of such a dramatic abortion as that which bears the grotesque and puerile inscription, ‘ If this be not a good Play, the Devil is in it.’ A worse has seldom discredited the name of any man with a spark of genius in him. Dryden’s delectable tragedy of *Amboyna*, Lee’s remarkable tragicomedy of *Gloriana*, Pope’s elegant comedy of *Three Hours after Marriage*, are scarcely more unworthy of their authors, more futile or more flaccid or more audacious in their headlong and unabashed incompetence. Charity would suggest that it must have been written against time in a debtor’s prison, under the influence of such liquor as Catherina Bountinall or Doll Tearsheet would have flung at the tapster’s head with an accompaniment of such language as those eloquent and high-spirited ladies, under less offensive provocation, were wont to lavish on the officials of an oppressive law. I have read a good deal of bad verse, but anything

like the metre of this play I have never come across in all the range of that excruciating experience. The rare and faint indications that the writer was or had been an humourist and a poet serve only to bring into fuller relief the reckless and shameless incompetence of the general workmanship.¹

This supernatural and 'superlunatical' attempt at serious farce or farcical morality marks the nadir of Dekker's ability as a dramatist. The diabolic part of the tragicomic business is distinctly inferior to the parallel or similar scenes in the much older play of *Grim the Collier of Croydon*, which is perhaps more likely to have been the writer's immediate model than the original story by Machiavelli. The two remaining plays now extant which bear the single name of Dekker give no sign of his highest powers, but are tolerable examples of journeyman's work in

¹ As I have given elsewhere a sample of Dekker at his best, I give here a sample taken at random from the opening of this unhappy play :

Hie thee to Naples, Rufman ; thou shalt find
 A prince there newly crowned, aptly inclined
 To any bendings : lest his youthful brows
 Reach at stars only, weigh down his loftiest boughs
 With leaden plummets, poison his best thoughts with taste
 Of things most sensual : if the heart once waste,
 The body feels consumption : good or bad kings
 Breed subjects like them : clear streams flow from clear springs.
 Turn therefore Naples to a puddle : with a civil
 Much promising face, and well oiled, play the court devil.

The vigorous melody of these 'masculine numbers' is not more remarkable for its virile force and honied fluency than is the lighter dialogue of the play for such brilliant wit or lambent humour as flashes out in pleasantries like this :

King. What are you, and whence come you ?

Rufman.

From Helvetia.

Spendola. What hell says he ?

Jovinelli. Peace ; you shall know hot hell [sic] time enough.

'I hope here be proofs' that my strictures on the worst work of a poet whose best work I treasure so heartily, and whose best qualities I rate so highly, are rather too sparing than too severe.

the field of romantic or fanciful comedy. *Match me in London* is the better play of the two, very fairly constructed after its simple fashion, and reasonably well written in a smooth and unambitious style: *The Wonder of a Kingdom* is a light, slight, rough piece of work, in its contrasts of character as crude and boyish as any of the old moralities, and in its action as mere a dance of puppets: but it shows at least that Dekker had regained the faculty of writing decent verse on occasion. The fine passage quoted by Scott in *The Antiquary*, and taken by his editors to be a forgery of his own, will be familiar to many myriads of readers who are never likely to look it up in the original context. Of two masques called *Britannia's Honour* and *London's Tempe* it must suffice to say that the former contains a notable specimen of cockney or canine French which may serve to relieve the conscientious reader's weariness, and the latter a comic song of blacksmiths at work which may pass muster at a pinch as a tolerably quaint and lively piece of rough and ready fancy. But Jonson for the court and Middleton for the city were far better craftsmen in this line than ever was Dekker at his best.

Two plays remain for notice in which the part taken by Dekker would be, I venture to think, unmistakable, even if no external evidence were extant of his partnership in either. As it is, we know that in the winter which saw the close of the sixteenth century he was engaged with the author of *The Parliament of Bees* and the author of *Englishmen for my Money* in the production of a play called *The Spanish Moor's Tragedy*. More than half a century afterwards, a tragedy in which a Spanish Moor is the principal and indeed the only considerable agent was published, and attributed—of all poets in the world—

to Christopher Marlowe, by a knavish and ignorant bookseller of the period. That *Lust's Dominion, or the Lascivious Queen*, was partly founded on a pamphlet published after Marlowe's death was not a consideration sufficient to offer any impediment to this imposture. That the hand which in the year of this play's appearance on the stage gave *Old Fortunatus* to the world of readers was the hand to which we owe the finer scenes or passages of *Lust's Dominion*, the whole of the opening scene bears such apparent witness as requires no evidence to support and would require very conclusive evidence to confute it. The sweet spontaneous luxury of the lines in which the queen strives to seduce her paramour out of sullenness has the very ring of Dekker's melody : the rough and reckless rattle of the abrupt rhymes intended to express a sudden vehemence of change and energy ; the constant repetition or reiteration of interjections and ejaculations which are evidently supposed to give an air of passionate realism and tragic nature to the jingling and jerky dialogue ; many little mannerisms too trivial to specify and too obvious to mistake ; the occasional spirit and beauty, the frequent crudity and harshness, of the impetuous and uncertain style ; the faults no less than the merits, the merits as plainly as the faults, attest the presence of his fitful and wilful genius with all the defects of its qualities and all the weakness of its strength. The chaotic extravagance of collapse which serves by way of catastrophe to bring the action headlong to a close is not more puerile in the violence of its debility than the conclusions of other plays by Dekker ; conclusions which might plausibly appear, to a malcontent or rather to a lenient reader, the improvisations of ineptitude. There is but one character which stands

out in anything of lifelike relief ; for the queen and her paramour are but the usual diabolic puppets of the contemporary tragic stage : but there is something of life-blood in the part of the honest and hot-headed young prince. This too is very like Dekker, whose idle and impatient energy could seldom if ever sustain a diffused or divided interest, but except when working hopelessly and heartlessly against time was likely to fix on some special point, and give life at least to some single figure.

There is nothing incongruous in his appearance as a playwright in partnership with Middleton or with Chettle, with Haughton or with Day ; but a stranger association than that of Massinger's name with Dekker's it would not be easy to conceive. Could either poet have lent the other something of his own best quality ; could Massinger have caught from Dekker the freshness and spontaneity of his poetic inspiration, and Dekker have learnt of Massinger the conscientious excellence and studious self-respect of his dramatic workmanship ; the result must have been one of the noblest and completest masterpieces of the English stage. As it is, the famous and beautiful play which we owe to the alliance of their powers is a proverbial example of incongruous contrasts and combinations. The opening and the closing scenes were very properly and very fortunately consigned to the charge of the younger and sedater poet : so that, whatever discrepancy may disturb the intervening acts, the grave and sober harmonies of a temperate and serious artist begin and end the concert in perfect correspondence of consummate execution. 'The first act of *The Virgin Martyr*', said Coleridge, 'is as fine an act as I remember in any play.' And certainly it would be

impossible to find one in which the business of the scene is more skilfully and smoothly opened, with more happiness of arrangement, more dignity and dexterity of touch. But most lovers of poetry would give it all, and a dozen such triumphs of scenical and rhetorical composition, for the brief dialogue in the second act between the heroine and her attendant angel. Its simplicity is so childlike, its inspiration so pure in instinct and its expression so perfect in taste, its utterance and its abstinence, its effusion and its reserve, are so far beyond praise or question or any comment but thanksgiving, that these forty-two lines, homely and humble in manner as they are if compared with the refined rhetoric and the scrupulous culture of Massinger, would suffice to keep the name of Dekker sweet and safe for ever among the most memorable if not among the most pre-eminent of his kindred and his age. The four scenes of rough and rank buffoonery which deface this act and the two following have given very reasonable offence to critics from whom they have provoked very unreasonable reflections. That they represent the coarser side of the genius whose finer aspect is shown in the sweetest passages of the poem has never been disputed by any one capable of learning the rudiments or the accidence of literary criticism. An admirable novelist and poet who had the misfortune to mistake himself for a theologian and a critic was unlucky enough to assert that he knew not on what ground these brutal buffooneries had been assigned to their unmistakable author; in other words, to acknowledge his ignorance of the first elements of the subject on which it pleased him to write in a tone of critical and spiritual authority. Not even when his unwary and unscrupulous audacity of self-confidence impelled

Charles Kingsley to challenge John Henry Newman to the duel of which the upshot left him gasping so piteously on the ground selected for their tournament—not even then did the author of *Hypatia* display such a daring and immedicable capacity of misrepresentation based on misconception as when this most ingenuously disingenuous of all controversialists avowed himself 'aware of no canons of internal criticism which would enable us to decide as boldly as Mr. Gifford does that all the indecency is Dekker's and all the poetry Massinger's.' Now the words of Gifford's note on the dialogue of which I have already spoken, between the saint and the angel, are these. 'What follows is exquisitely beautiful. . . . I am persuaded that this also was written by Dekker.' And seeing that no mortal critic but Kingsley ever dreamed of such absurdity as Kingsley rushes forward to refute, his controversial capacity will probably be regarded by all serious students of poetry or criticism as measurable by the level of his capacity for accurate report of fact or accurate citation of evidence.

There are times when we are tempted to denounce the Muse of Dekker as the most shiftless and shameless of slovens or of sluts; but when we consider the quantity of work which she managed to struggle or shuffle through with such occasionally admirable and memorable results, we are once more inclined to reclaim for her a place of honour among her more generally respectable or reputable sisters. I am loth to believe what I see no reason to suppose, that she was responsible for the dismal drivel of a poem on the fall of Jerusalem, which is assigned, on the surely dangerous ground of initials subscribed under the dedication, to a writer who had the misfortune to

share these initials with Thomas Deloney. The ballad-writing hack may have been capable of sinking so far below the level of a penny ballad as to perpetrate this monstrous outrage on human patience and on English verse ; but the most conclusive evidence would be necessary to persuade a jury of competent readers that a poet must be found guilty of its authorship. And we know that a pamphlet or novelette of Deloney's called *Thomas of Reading, or the Six Worthy Yeomen of the West*, was ascribed to Dekker until the actual author was discovered.¹ Dr. Grosart, to whom we owe the first collected edition of Dekker's pamphlets, says in the introduction to the fifth of his beautiful volumes that he should have doubted the responsibility of Dekker for a poem with which it may perhaps be unfair to saddle even so humble a hackney on the poetic highway as the jaded Pegasus of Deloney, had he not been detected as the author of another religious book. But this latter is a book of the finest and rarest quality—one of its author's most unquestionable claims to immortality in the affection and admiration of all but the most unworthy readers ; and *Canaan's Calamity* is one of the worst metrical samples extant of religious rubbish. As far as such inferential evidence can be allowed to attest anything, the fact of Dekker's having written one of the most beautiful and simple of religious books in prose tends surely

¹ It would be a very notable addition to Dekker's claims on our remembrance if he had indeed written the admirable narrative, worthy of Defoe at his very best, which describes with such impressive simplicity of tragic effect the presageful or premonitory anguish of a man on his unconscious way to a sudden and a secret death of unimaginable horror. Had Deloney done more such work as this, and abjured the ineffectual service of an inauspicious Muse, his name would now be famous among the founders and the masters of realistic fiction.

rather to disprove than to prove his authorship of one of the feeblest and most pretentious of semi-sacred rhapsodies in verse.

Among his numerous pamphlets, satirical or declamatory, on the manners of his time and the observations of his experience, one alone stands out as distinct from the rest by right of such astonishing superiority in merit of style and interest of matter that I prefer to reserve it for separate and final consideration. But it would require more time and labour than I can afford to give an adequate account of so many effusions or improvisations as served for fuel to boil the scanty and precarious pot of his uncertain and uncomfortable sustenance. ‘The Wonderful Year’ of the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James, and the devastation of London by pestilence, supplied him with matter enough for one of his quaintest and liveliest tracts : in which the historical part has no quality so valuable or remarkable as the grotesque mixture of horror and humour in the anecdotes appended ‘like a merry epilogue to a dull play, of purpose to shorten the lives of long winter’s nights that lie watching in the dark for us,’ with touches of rude and vivid pleasantry not unworthy to remind us, I dare not say of the Decameron, but at least of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*. In *The Seven Deadly Sins of London*—one of the milder but less brilliant ‘Latterday Pamphlets’ of a gentler if no less excitable Carlyle—there are touches of earnest eloquence as well as many quaint and fitful illustrations of social history ; but there is less of humorous vigour and straightforward realism than in the preceding tract. And yet there are good things to be gathered out of this effusive and vehement lay sermon : this sentence for example is worth recollection :—‘He

is not slothful that is only lazy, that only wastes his good hours and his silver in luxury and licentious ease:—no, he is the true slothful man, that does no good.' And there is genuine insight as well as honesty and courage in his remonstrance with the self-love and appeal against the self-deceit of his countrymen, so prone to cry out on the cruelty of others, on the bloodthirstiness of Frenchmen and Spaniards, and to overlook the heavy-headed brutality of their own habitual indifference and neglect. Although the cruelty of penal laws be now abrogated, yet the condition of the poorest among us is assuredly not such that we can read without a sense of their present veracity the last words of this sentence:—

'Thou set'st up posts to whip them when they are alive: set up an hospital to comfort them being sick, or purchase ground for them to dwell in when they be well; *and that is, when they be dead.*' The next of Dekker's tracts is more of a mere imitation than any of his others: the influence of a more famous pamphleteer and satirist, Tom Nash, is here not only manifest as that of a model, but has taken such possession of his disciple that he is hardly more than a somewhat servile copyist; not without a touch of his master's more serious eloquence, but with less than little of his peculiar energy and humour. That rushing wind of satire, that storm of resonant invective, that inexhaustible volubility of contempt, which rages through the controversial writings of the lesser poet, has sunk to a comparative whisper; the roar of his Homeric or Rabelaisian laughter to a somewhat forced and artificial chuckle. *This News from Hell, brought by the Devil's Carrier,* and containing 'The Devil's Answer to Pierce Penniless,' might have miscarried by the way without much more loss than that of such

an additional proof as we could have been content to spare of Dekker's incompetence to deal with a subject which he was curiously fond of handling in earnest and in jest. He seems indeed to have fancied himself, if not something of a Dante, something at least of a Quevedo ; but his terrors are merely tedious, and his painted devils would not terrify a babe. In this tract, however, there are now and then some fugitive felicities of expression ; and this is more than can be said for either the play or the poem in which he has gone, with feebler if not more uneasy steps than Milton's Satan, over the same ground of burning marl. There is some spirit in the prodigal's denunciation of his miserly father : but the best thing in the pamphlet is the description of the soul of a hero bound for paradise, whose name is given only in the revised and enlarged edition which appeared a year later under the title of *A Knight's Conjuring ; done in earnest ; discovered in jest.* The narrative of ' William Eps his death ' is a fine example of that fiery sympathy with soldiers which glows in so many pages of Dekker's verse, and flashes out by fits through the murky confusion of his worst and most formless plays ; but the introduction of this hero is as fine a passage of prose as he has left us :

The foremost of them was a personage of so composed a presence, that Nature and Fortune had done him wrong, if they had not made him a soldier. *In his countenance there was a kind of indignation, fighting with a kind of exalted joy,* which by his very gesture were apparently decipherable ; for he was jocund, that his soul went out of him in so glorious a triumph ; but disdainfully angry, that she wrought her enlargement enow on his breast, which testified, he did not yield till he was

conquered, and was not conquered, till there was left nothing of a man in him to be overcome.

That the poet's loyalty and devotion were at least as ardent when offered by his gratitude to sailors as to soldiers we may see by this description of 'The Seaman' in his next work :

A progress doth he take from realm to realm,
With goodly water-pageants borne before him ;
The safety of the land sits at his helm,
No danger here can touch, but what runs o'er him :
But being in heaven's eye still, it doth restore him
To livelier spirits ; to meet death with ease,
*If thou wouldest know thy maker, search the seas.*¹

These homely but hearty lines occur in a small and mainly metrical tract bearing a title so quaint that I am tempted to transcribe it at length :—*The Double PP. A Papist in Arms. Bearing Ten several Shields. Encountered by the Protestant. At Ten several Weapons. A Jesuit Marching before them. Cominius and Eminius.* There are a few other vigorous and pointed verses in this little patriotic impromptu, but the greater part of it is merely curious and eccentric doggrel.

The next of Dekker's tracts or pamphlets was the comparatively well-known *Gull's Horn-book*. This brilliant and vivid little satire is so rich in simple humour, and in lifelike photography taken by the sunlight of an honest and kindly nature, that it stands second only to the author's masterpiece in prose, *The Bachelor's Banquet*, which has waited so much longer for even the limited recognition implied by a private reprint. There are so many witty or sensible or humorous or grotesque excerpts to be selected

¹ The italics are here the author's.

from this pamphlet—and not from the parts borrowed or copied from a foreign satire on the habits of slovenly Hollanders—that I take the first which comes under my notice on reopening the book: a study which sets before us in fascinating relief the professional poeticule of a period in which as yet clubs, coteries, and newspapers were not—or at the worst were nothing to speak of:

If you be a Poet, and come into the Ordinary (though it can be no great glory to be an ordinary Poet) order yourself thus. Observe no man, doff not cap to that gentleman to-day at dinner, to whom, not two nights since, you were behoden for a supper; but, after a turn or two in the room, take occasion (pulling out your gloves) to have some Epigram, or Satire, or Sonnet fastened in one of them, that may (as it were unwittingly to you) offer itself to the Gentlemen: they will presently desire it: but, without much conjuration from them, and a pretty kind of counterfeit lothness in yourself, do not read it; and, though it be none of your own, swear you made it.

This coupling of injunction and prohibition is worthy of Shakespeare or of Sterne.

Marry, if you chance to get into your hands any witty thing of another man's, that is somewhat better, I would counsel you then, if demand be made who composed it, you may say: 'Faith, a learned Gentleman, a very worthy friend.' And this seeming to lay it on another man will be counted either modesty in you, or a sign that you are not ambitious of praise, or else that you dare not take it upon you, for fear of the sharpness it carries with it.

The modern poetaster by profession knows a trick worth any two of these: but it is curious to observe the community of baseness, and the comparative innocence of awkwardness and inexperience, which

at once connote the species and denote the specimens of the later and the earlier animalcule.

The *Fests to make you merry*, which in Dr. Grosart's edition are placed after *The Gull's Horn-book*, though dated two years earlier, will hardly give so much entertainment to any probable reader in our own time as 'The Misery of a Prison, and a Prisoner' will give him pain to read of in the closing pages of the same pamphlet, when he remembers how long—at the lowest computation—its author had endured the loathsome and hideous misery which he has described with such bitter and pathetic intensity and persistency in detail. Well may Dr. Grosart say that 'it shocks us to-day, though so far off, to think of 1598 to 1616 onwards covering so sorrowful and humiliating trials for so finely touched a spirit as was Dekker's'; but I think as well as hope that there is no sort of evidence to that surely rather improbable as well as deplorable effect. It may be 'possible,' but it is barely possible, that some 'seven years' continuous imprisonment' is the explanation of an ambiguous phrase which is now incapable of any certain solution, and capable of many an interpretation far less deplorable than this. But in this professedly comic pamphlet there are passages as tragic, if not as powerful, as any in the immortal pages of *Pickwick* and *Little Dorrit* which deal with a later but a too similar phase of prison discipline and tradition :

The thing that complained was a man :—' Thy days have gone over thee like the dreams of a fool, thy nights like the watchings of a madman.—Oh sacred liberty ! with how little devotion do men come into thy temples, when they cannot bestow upon thee too much honour ! Thy embracements are more delicate than those of a young bride with her lover, and to be divorced from thee is half to be damned ! For what else

is a prison but the very next door to hell ? It is a man's grave, wherein he walks alive : it is a sea wherein he is always shipwrackt : it is a lodging built out of the world : it is a wilderness where all that wander up and down grow wild, and all that come into it are devoured.'

In Dekker's next pamphlet, his *Dream*, there are perhaps half a dozen tolerably smooth and vigorous couplets immersed among many more vacuous and vehement in the intensity of their impotence than any reader and admirer of his more happily inspired verse could be expected to believe without evidence adduced. Of imagination, faith, or fancy, the ugly futility of this infernal vision has not—unless I have sought more than once for it in vain—a single saving trace or compensating shadow.

Two years after he had tried his hand at an imitation of Nash, Dekker issued the first of the pamphlets in which he attempted to take up the succession of Robert Greene as a picaresque writer, or purveyor of guidebooks through the realms of rascaldom. *The Bellman of London*, or Rogue's Horn-book, begins with a very graceful and fanciful description of the quiet beauty and seclusion of a country retreat in which the author had sought refuge from the turmoil and forgetfulness of the vices of the city ; and whence he was driven back upon London by disgust at the discovery of villainy as elaborate and roguery as abject in the beggars and thieves of the country as the most squalid recesses of metropolitan vice or crime could supply. The narrative of this accidental discovery is very lively and spirited in its straightforward simplicity, and the subsequent revelations of rascality are sometimes humorous as well as curious : but the demand for such literature must have been singularly persistent to evoke a sequel

to this book next year, *Lantern and Candle-light, or the Bellman's Second Night-walk*, in which Dekker continues his account of vagrant and villainous society, its lawless laws and its unmannerly manners ; and gives the reader some vivid studies, interspersed with facile rhetoric and interlarded with indignant declamation, of the tricks of horsedealers and the shifts of gipsies—or ‘moon-men’ as he calls them ; a race which he regarded with a mixture of angry perplexity and passionate disgust. *A Strange Horse-race* between various virtues and vices gives occasion for the display of some allegoric ingenuity and much indefatigable but fatiguing pertinacity in the exposure of the more exalted swindlers of the age—the crafty bankrupts who anticipated the era of the Merdles described by Dickens, but who can hardly have done much immediate injury to a capitalist of the rank of Dekker. Here too there are glimpses of inventive spirit and humorous ingenuity ; but the insufferable iteration of jocose demonology and infernal burlesque might tempt the most patient and the most curious of readers to devote the author, with imprecations or invocations as elaborate as his own, to the spiritual potentate whose ‘last will and testament’ is transcribed into the text of this pamphlet.

In *The Dead Term* such a reader will find himself more or less relieved by the return of his author to a more terrene and realistic sort of allegory. This recriminatory dialogue between the London and the Westminster of 1608 is now and then rather flatulent in its reciprocity of rhetoric, but is enlivened by an occasional breath of genuine eloquence, and redeemed by touches of historic or social interest. The title and motto of the next year’s pamphlet—*Work for Armourers, or the Peace is Broken.—God help the Poor,*

the rich can shift—were presumably designed to attract the casual reader, by what would now be called a sensational device, to consideration of the social question between rich and poor—or, as he puts it, between the rival queens, Poverty and Money. The forces on either side are drawn out and arrayed with pathetic ingenuity, and the result is indicated with a quaint and grim effect of humorous if indignant resignation. *The Raven's Almanack* of the same year, though portentous in its menace of plague, famine, and civil war, is less noticeable for its moral and religious declamation than for its rather amusing than edifying anecdotes; which, it must again be admitted, in their mixture of jocular sensuality with somewhat ferocious humour, rather remind us of King Louis XI. than of that royal novelist's Italian models or precursors. *A Rod for Runaways* is the title of a tract which must have somewhat perplexed the readers who came to it for practical counsel or suggestion, seeing that the very title-page calls their attention to the fact that, 'if they look back, they may behold many fearful judgments of God, sundry ways pronounced upon this city, and on several persons, both flying from it, and staying in it.' What the medical gentleman to whom this tract was dedicated may have thought of the author's logic and theology, we can only conjecture. But even in this little pamphlet there are anecdotes and details which would repay the notice of a social historian as curious in his research and as studious in his condescension as Macaulay.

A prayerbook written or compiled by a poet of Dekker's rank in Dekker's age would have some interest for the reader of a later generation even if it had not the literary charm which distinguishes

the little volume of devotions now reprinted from a single and an imperfect copy. We cannot be too grateful for the good fortune and the generous care to which we are indebted for this revelation of a work of genius so curious and so delightful that the most fanatical of atheists or agnostics, the hardest and the driest of philosophers, might be moved and fascinated by the exquisite simplicity of its beauty. Hardly even in those almost incomparable collects which Macaulay so aptly compared with the sonnets of Milton shall we find sentences or passages more perfect in their union of literary grace with ardent sincerity than here. Quaint as are several of the prayers in the professional particulars of their respective appeals, this quaintness has nothing of irreverence or incongruity: and the subtle simplicity of cadence in the rhythmic movement of the style is so nearly impeccable that we are perplexed to understand how so exquisite an ear as was Dekker's at its best can have been tolerant of such discord or insensible to such collapse as so often disappoints or shocks us in the hastier and cruder passages of his faltering and fluctuating verse. The prayer for a soldier going to battle and his thanksgiving after victory are as noble in the dignity of their devotion as the prayers for a woman in travail and 'for them that visit the sick' are delicate and earnest in their tenderness. The prayer for a prisoner is too beautiful to stand in need of the additional and pathetic interest which it derives from the fact of its author's repeated experience of the misery it expresses with such piteous yet such manful resignation. The style of these faultlessly simple devotions is almost grotesquely set off by the relief of a comparison with the bloated bombast and flatulent pedantry

of a prayer by the late Queen Elizabeth which Dekker has transcribed into his text—it is hardly possible to suppose, without perception of the contrast between its hideous jargon and the refined purity of his own melodious English. The prayer for the Council is singularly noble in the eloquence of its patriotism : the prayer for the country is simply magnificent in the austere music of its fervent cadences : the prayer in time of civil war is so passionate in its cry for deliverance from all danger of the miseries then or lately afflicting the continent that it might well have been put up by a loyal patriot in the very heat of the great war which Dekker might have lived to see break out in his own country. The prayer for the evening is so beautiful as to double our regret for the deplorable mutilation which has deprived us of all but the opening of the morning prayer.¹ The feathers fallen from the wings of these *Four Birds of Noah's Ark* would be worth more to the literary ornithologist than whole flocks of such 'tame villatic fowl' as people the ordinary coops and hen-roosts of devotional literature.

One work only of Dekker's too often overtired and heavy-laden genius remains to be noticed ; it is one which gives him a high place for ever among English humourists. No sooner has the reader run his eye over the first three or four pages than he feels himself, with delight and astonishment, in the company of a writer whose genius is akin at once to Goldsmith's and to Thackeray's ; a writer whose style is so pure and vigorous, so lucid and straight-

¹ A noticeable instance of the use of a common word in the original and obsolete sense of its derivation may be cited from the unfortunately truncated and scanty fragment of a prayer for the court : 'Oh Lord, be thou a husband' (house-band) 'to that great household of our King.'

forward, that we seem to have already entered upon the best age of English prose. Had Mr. Matthew Arnold, instead of digging in Chapman for preposterous barbarisms and eccentricities of pedantry, chanced to light upon this little treatise ; or had he condescended to glance over Daniel's compact and admirable *Defence of Rhyme* ; he would have found in writers of the despised Shakespearean epoch much more than a foretaste of those excellent qualities which he imagined to have been first imported into our literature by writers of the age of Dryden. The dialogue of the very first couple introduced with such skilful simplicity of presentation at the opening of Dekker's pamphlet is worthy of Sterne : the visit of the gossip or kinswoman in the second chapter is worthy of Molière ; and the humours of the monthly nurse in the third are worthy of Dickens. The lamentations of the lady for the decay of her health and beauty in consequence of her obsequious husband's alleged neglect, ' no more like the woman I was than an apple is like an oyster ' ; the description of the poor man making her broth with his own hands, jeered at by the maids and trampled underfoot by Mrs. Gamp ; the preparations for the christening supper and the preliminary feast of scandal ; are full of such bright and rich humour as to recall even the creator of Dogberry and Mrs. Quickly. It is of Shakespeare again that we are reminded in the next chapter, by the description of the equipage to which the husband of ' a woman that hath a charge of children ' is reduced when he has to ride to the assizes in sorrier plight than Petruchio rode in to his wedding ; the details remind us also of Balzac in the minute and grotesque intensity of their industrious realism : but the scene on his return reminds us

rather of Thackeray at the best of his bitterest mood—the terrible painter of Mrs. Mackenzie and Mrs. General Baynes. ‘The humour of a woman that marries her inferior by birth’ deals with more serious matters in a style not unworthy of Boccaccio; and no comedy of the time—Shakespeare’s always excepted—has a scene in it of richer and more original humour than brightens the narrative which relates the woes of the husband who invites his friends to dinner and finds everything under lock and key. Hardly in any of Dekker’s plays is the comic dialogue so masterly as here—so vivid and so vigorous in its lifelike ease and spontaneity. But there is not one of the fifteen chapters, devoted each to the description of some fresh ‘humour,’ which would not deserve, did space and time allow of it, a separate note of commentary. The book is simply one of the very finest examples of humorous literature, touched now and then with serious and even tragic effect, that can be found in any language; it is generally and comparatively remarkable for its freedom from all real coarseness or brutality, though the inevitable change of manners between Shakespeare’s time and our own may make some passages or episodes seem now and then somewhat over particular in plain-speaking or detail. But a healthier, manlier, more thoroughly good-natured and good-humoured book was never written; nor one in which the author’s real and respectful regard for womanhood was more perceptible through the veil of a satire more pure from bitterness and more honest in design.

The list of works over which we have now glanced is surely not inconsiderable; and yet the surviving productions of Dekker’s genius or necessity are but part of the labours of his life. If he wanted—as

undoubtedly he would seem to have wanted—that ‘infinite capacity for taking pains’ which Carlyle professed to regard as the synonym of genius, he was at least not deficient in that rough and ready diligence which is habitually in harness, and cheerfully or resignedly prepared for the day’s work. The names of his lost plays—all generally suggestive of some true dramatic interest, now graver and now lighter—are too numerous to transcribe: but one at least of them must excite unspeakable amazement as well as indiscreet curiosity in every reader of Ariosto or La Fontaine who comes in the course of the catalogue upon such a title as *Jocondo and Astolfo*. How on earth the famous story of Giocondo could possibly be adapted for representation on the public stage of Shakespearean London is a mystery which the execrable cook of the execrable Warburton has left for ever insoluble and inconceivable: for to that female fiend, the object of Sir Walter Scott’s antiquarian imprecations, we owe, unless my memory misguides me, the loss of this among other irredeemable treasures.

To do justice upon the faults of this poet is easy for any sciolist: to do justice to his merits is less easy for the most competent scholar and the most appreciative critic. In despite of his rare occasional spurts or outbreaks of self-assertion or of satire, he seems to stand before us a man of gentle, modest, shiftless and careless nature, irritable and placable, eager and unsteady, full of excitable kindness and deficient in strenuous principle; loving the art which he professionally followed, and enjoying the work which he occasionally neglected. There is no unpoetic note in his best poetry such as there is too often—nay, too constantly—in the severer work and

the stronger genius of Ben Jonson. What he might have done under happier auspices, or with a tougher fibre of resolution and perseverance in his character, it is waste of time and thought for his most sympathetic and compassionate admirers to assume or to conjecture : what he has done, with all its shortcomings and infirmities, is enough to secure for him a distinct and honourable place among the humourists and the poets of his country.

JOHN MARSTON

IF justice has never been done, either in his own day or in any after age, to a poet of real genius and original powers, it will generally be presumed, with more or less fairness or unfairness, that this is in great part his own fault. Some perversity or obliquity will be suspected, even if no positive infirmity or deformity can be detected, in his intelligence or in his temperament: some taint or some flaw will be assumed to affect and to vitiate his creative instinct or his spiritual reason. And in the case of John Marston, the friend and foe of Ben Jonson, the fierce and foul-mouthed satirist, the ambitious and overweening tragedian, the scornful and passionate humourist, it is easy for the shallowest and least appreciative reader to perceive the nature and to estimate the weight of such drawbacks or impediments as have so long and so seriously interfered with the due recognition of an independent and remarkable poet. The praise and the blame, the admiration and the distaste excited by his works, are equally just, but are seemingly incompatible: the epithets most exactly appropriate to the style of one scene, one page, one speech in a scene or one passage in a speech, are most ludicrously inapplicable to the next. An anthology of such noble and beautiful excerpts might be collected from his plays, that the reader who should make his first acquaintance with this poet through the deceptive means of so flattering an introduction would be justified in supposing that he

had fallen in with a tragic dramatist of the very highest order—with a new candidate for a station in the very foremost rank of English poets. And if the evil star which seems generally to have presided over the literary fortunes of John Marston should misguide the student, on first opening a volume of his works, into some such arid or miry tract of wilderness as too frequently deforms the face of his uneven and irregular demesne, the inevitable sense of disappointment and repulsion which must immediately ensue will too probably discourage a casual explorer from any renewal of his research.

Two of the epithets which Ben Jonson, in his elaborate attack on Marston, selected for ridicule as characteristically grotesque instances of affected and infelicitous innovation—but which nevertheless have taken root in the language, and practically justified their adoption—describe as happily as any that could be chosen to describe the better and the worse quality of his early tragic and satiric style. These words are ‘strenuous’ and ‘clumsy.’ It is perpetually, indefatigably, and fatiguingly strenuous; it is too often vehemently, emphatically, and laboriously clumsy. But at its best, when the clumsy and ponderous incompetence of expression which disfigures it is supplanted by a strenuous felicity of ardent and triumphant aspiration, it has notes and touches in the compass of its course not unworthy of Webster or Tourneur or even Shakespeare himself. Its occasionally exquisite delicacy is as remarkable as its more frequent excess of coarseness, awkwardness, or violent and elaborate extravagance. No sooner has he said anything especially beautiful, pathetic, or sublime, than the evil genius must needs take his turn, exact as it were the forfeit of his bond, impel the poet into

some sheer perversity, deface the flow and form of the verse with some preposterous crudity or flatulence of phrase which would discredit the most incapable or the most fantastic novice. And the worst of it all is that he limps or stumbles with either foot alternately. At one moment he exaggerates the license of artificial rhetoric, the strain and swell of the most high-flown and hyperbolical poetic diction ; at the next, he falls flat upon the naked level of insignificant or offensive realism.

These are no slight charges ; and it is impossible for any just or sober judgment to acquit John Marston of the impeachment conveyed in them. The answer to it is practical and simple : it is that his merits are great enough to outweigh and overshadow them all. Even if his claim to remembrance were merely dependent on the value of single passages, this would suffice to secure him his place of honour in the train of Shakespeare. If his most ambitious efforts at portraiture of character are often faulty at once in colour and in outline, some of his slighter sketches have a freshness and tenderness of beauty which may well atone for the gravest of his certainly not infrequent offences. The sweet constancy and gentle fortitude of a Beatrice and a Mellida remain in the memory more clearly, leave a more lifelike impression of truth on the reader's mind, than the light-headed profligacy and passionate instability of such brainless and bloodthirsty wantons as Franceschina and Isabella. In fact, the better characters in Marston's plays are better drawn, less conventional, more vivid and more human than those of the baser sort. Whatever of moral credit may be due to a dramatist who paints virtue better than vice, and has a happier hand at a hero's likeness than at a villain's, must unquestionably be assigned to the author of *Antonio and Mellida*. Piero, the tyrant

and traitor, is little more than a mere stage property : like Mendoza in *The Malcontent* and Syphax in *Sophonisba*, he would be a portentous ruffian if he had a little more life in him ; he has to do the deeds and express the emotions of a most bloody and crafty miscreant ; but it is only now and then that we catch the accent of a real man in his tones of cajolery or menace, dissimulation or triumph. Andrugio, the venerable and heroic victim of his craft and cruelty, is a figure not less living and actual than stately and impressive : the changes of mood from meditation to passion, from resignation to revolt, from tenderness to resolution, which mark the development of the character with the process of the action, though painted rather broadly than subtly, and with more of vigour than of care, show just such power of hand and sincerity of instinct as we fail to find in the hot and glaring colours of his rival's monotonous ruffianism. Again, in *The Wonder of Women*, the majestic figures of Massinissa, Gelosso, and Sophonisba stand out in clearer relief than the traitors of the senate, the lecherous malignity of Syphax, or the monstrous profile of the sorceress Erichtho. In this laboured and ambitious tragedy, as in the two parts of *Antonio and Mellida*, we see the poet at his best—and also at his worst. A vehement and resolute desire to give weight to every line and emphasis to every phrase has too often misled him into such brakes and jungles of crabbed and convulsive bombast, of stiff and tortuous exuberance, that the reader in struggling through some of the scenes and speeches feels as though he were compelled to push his way through a cactus hedge : the hot and heavy blossoms of rhetoric blaze and glare out of a thickset fence of jagged barbarisms and exotic monstrosities of metaphor.

The straining and sputtering declamation of narrative and oratory scarcely succeeds in expressing through a dozen quaint and far-fetched words or phrases what two or three of the simplest would easily and amply have sufficed to convey. But when the poet is content to deliver his message like a man of this world, we discover with mingled satisfaction, astonishment, and irritation that he can write when he pleases in a style of the purest and noblest simplicity ; that he can make his characters converse in a language worthy of Sophocles when he does not prefer to make them stutter in a dialect worthy of Lycophron. And in the tragedy of *Sophonisba* the display of this happy capacity is happily reserved for the crowning scene of the poem. It would be difficult to find anywhere a more preposterous or disjointed piece of jargon than the speech of Asdrubal at the close of the second act :

Brook open scorn, faint powers !—
Make good the camp !—No, fly !—yes, what ?—wild rage !—
To be a prosperous villain ! yet some heat, some hold ;
But to burn temples, and yet freeze, O cold !
Give me some health ; now your blood sinks : thus deeds
Ill nourished rot : without Jove nought succeeds.

And yet this passage occurs in a poem which contains such a passage as the following :

And now with undismayed resolve behold,
To save you—you—for honour and just faith
Are most true gods, which we should much adore—
With even disdainful vigour I give up
An abhorred life !—You have been good to me,
And I do thank thee, heaven. O my stars,
I bless your goodness, that with breast unstained,
Faith pure, a virgin wife, tried to my glory,
I die, of female faith the long-lived story ;
Secure from bondage and all servile harms,
But more, most happy in my husband's arms.

The lofty sweetness, the proud pathos, the sonorous simplicity of these most noble verses might scarcely suffice to attest the poet's possession of any strong dramatic faculty. But the scene immediately preceding bears evidence of a capacity for terse and rigorous brevity of dialogue in a style as curt and condensed as that of Tacitus or Dante.

SOPHONISBA. What unjust grief afflicts my worthy lord ?

MASSINISSA. Thank me, ye gods, with much beholdingness ;
For, mark, I do not curse you.

SOPHONISBA. Tell me, sweet,
The cause of thy much anguish.

MASSINISSA. Ha, the cause ?

Let 's see ; wreath back thine arms, bend down thy neck,
Practise base prayers, make fit thyself for bondage.

SOPHONISBA. Bondage !

MASSINISSA. Bondage : Roman bondage. No, no !¹

SOPHONISBA. How then have I vowed well to Scipio ?

MASSINISSA. How then to Sophonisba ?

MASSINISSA. Right : which way
Run mad ? impossible distraction !²

SOPHONISBA. Dear lord, thy patience ; let it maze all power,
And list to her in whose sole heart it rests
To keep thy faith upright.

MASSINISSA. Wilt thou be slaved ?

SOPHONISBA. No ; free.

¹ This verse, unmusical to an English ear, is good Italian metre ; possibly an intentional and deliberate example of the poet's Italian predilections, and if so certainly a less irrational and inexplicable one than the intrusion of some villainously bad Italian lines and phrases into the text of *Antonio and Mellida*.

² In other words—intolerable or unimaginable division or disulsion of mind and spirit between two contending calls of honour, two irreconcilable claims of duty. Modern editors of this great scene have broken up the line into pieces, marked or divided by superfluous dashes and points of exclamation. Campbell, who had the good taste to confute his own depreciatory criticism of Marston by including the passage among his *Selections*, was the first, as far as I know, to adopt this erroneous and rather spasmodic punctuation.

MASSINISSA.

How then keep I my faith ?

SOPHONISBA.

My death

Gives help to all. From Rome so rest we free :

So brought to Scipio, faith is kept in thee.

MASSINISSA. Thou darest not die !—Some wine.—Thou darest
not die !SOPHONISBA. How near was I unto the curse of man,
Joy !

How like was I yet once to have been glad !

He that ne'er laughed may with a constant face

Contemn Jove's frown. Happiness makes us base.

The man or the boy does not seem to me enviable who can read or remember these verses without a thrill. In sheer force of concision they recall the manner of Alfieri ; but that noble tragic writer could hardly have put such fervour of austere passion into the rigid utterance, or touched the note of emotion with such a glowing depth of rapture. That 'bitter and severe delight'—if I may borrow the superb phrase of Landor—which inspires and sustains the imperial pride of self-immolation might have found in his dramatic dialect an expression as terse and as sincere : it could hardly have clothed itself with such majestic and radiant solemnity of living and breathing verse. The rapid elliptic method of amoebæan dialogue is more in his manner than in any English poet's known to me except the writer of this scene ; but indeed Marston is in more points than one the most Italian of our dramatists. His highest tone of serious poetry has in it, like Alfieri's, a note of self-conscious stoicism and somewhat arrogant self-control ; while as a comic writer he is but too apt, like too many transalpine wits, to mistake filth for fun, and to measure the neatness of a joke by its nastiness. Dirt for dirt's sake has never been the apparent aim of any great English humourist who had not

about him some unmistakable touch of disease—some inheritance of evil or of suffering like the congenital brain-sickness of Swift or the morbid infirmity of Sterne. A poet of so high an order as the author of *Sophonisba* could hardly fail to be in general a healthier writer than such as these; but it cannot be denied that he seems to have been somewhat inclined to accept the illogical inference which would argue that because some wit is dirty all dirt must be witty—because humour may sometimes be indecent, indecency must always be humorous. ‘The clartier the cosier’ was an old proverb among the northern peasantry while yet recalcitrant against the inroads of sanitary reform: ‘the dirtier the droller’ would seem to have been practically the no less irrational motto of many not otherwise unadmirable comic writers. It does happen that the drollest character in all Marston’s plays is also the most offensive in his language—‘the foulest-mouthed profane railing brother’; but the drollest passages in the whole part are those that least want washing. How far the example of Ben Jonson may have influenced or encouraged Marston in the indulgence of this unlovely propensity can only be conjectured; it is certain that no third writer of the time, however given to levity of speech or audacity in the selection of a subject, was so prone—in Shakespeare’s phrase—to ‘talk greasily’ as the authors of *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Dutch Courtesan*.

In the two parts of his earlier tragedy the interest is perhaps, on the whole, rather better sustained than in *The Wonder of Women*. The prologue to *Antonio’s Revenge* (the second part of the *Historie of Antonio and Mellida*) has enjoyed the double correlative honour of ardent appreciation by Lamb and re-

sponsive depreciation by Gifford. Its eccentricities and perversities of phrase¹ may be no less noticeable, but should assuredly be accounted less memorable, than its profound and impassioned fervour of grave and eloquent harmony. Strange, wayward and savage as is the all but impossible story, rude and crude and crabbed as is the pedantically exuberant language of these plays, there are touches in them of such terrible beauty and such terrible pathos as to convince any competent reader that they deserve the tribute of such praise and such dispraise. The youngest student of Lamb's *Specimens* can hardly fail to recognise this when he compares the vivid and piercing description of the death of Mellida with the fearful and supernatural impression of the scene which brings or thrusts before us the immolation of the child her brother.

The laboured eccentricity of style which signalises and disfigures the three chief tragedies or tragic poems of Marston is tempered and subdued to a soberer tone of taste and a more rational choice of expression in his less ambitious and less unequal works. It is almost impossible to imagine any insertion or addition from the hand of Webster which would not be at once obvious to any reader in the text of *Sophonisba* or in either part of *Antonio and Mellida*. Their fierce and irregular magnificence, their feverish and strenuous intemperance of rhetoric, would have been, too glaringly in contrast with the sublime purity of the greater poet's thought and style. In the tragicomedy of *The Malcontent*, published two years later than the earlier and two years earlier than the later of these poems, if the tone of

¹ One strange phrase in the very first line is surely a palpable misprint —ramps for cramps.

feeling is but little changed or softened, the language is duly clarified and simplified. *The Malcontent*, (*augmented*) by Marston, with the additions written by John Webster, is as coherent, as harmonious, as much of a piece throughout, as was the text of the play in its earlier state. Not all the conscientious art and skill of Webster could have given this uniformity to a work in which the original design and execution had been less in keeping with the bent of his own genius and the accent of his natural style. Sad and stern, not unhopeful or unloving, the spirit of this poem is more in harmony with that of Webster's later tragedies than with that of Marston's previous plays ; its accent is sardonic rather than pessimistic, ironical rather than despondent. The plot is neither well conceived nor well constructed ; the catastrophe is little less than absurd, especially from the ethical or moral point of view ; the characters are thinly sketched, the situations at once forced and conventional ; there are few sorrier or stranger figures in serious fiction than that of the penitent usurper when he takes to his arms his repentant wife, together with one of her two paramours, in a sudden rapture of forgiving affection ; the part which gives the play its name is the only one drawn with any firmness of outline, unless we except that of the malignant and distempered old parasite ; but there is a certain interest in the awkward evolution of the story, and there are scenes and passages of singular power and beauty which would suffice to redeem the whole work from condemnation or oblivion, even though it had not the saving salt in it of an earnest and evident sincerity. The brooding anger, the resentful resignation, the impatient spirit of endurance, the bitter passion of disdain, which animate the

utterance and direct the action of the hero, are something more than dramatically appropriate ; it is as obvious that these are the mainsprings of the poet's own ambitious and dissatisfied intelligence, sullen in its reluctant submission and ardent in its implacable appeal, as that his earlier undramatic satires were the tumultuous and turbid ebullitions of a mood as morbid, as restless, and as honest. Coarse, rough, and fierce as those satires are, inferior alike to Hall's in finish of verse and to Donne's in weight of matter, it seems to me that Dr. Grosart, their first careful and critical editor, is right in claiming for them equal if not superior credit on the score of earnestness. The crude ferocity of their invective has about it a savour of honesty which atones for many defects of literary taste and executive art ; and after a more thorough study than such rude and unattractive work seems at first to require or to deserve, the moral and intellectual impression of the whole will not improbably be far more favourable than one resulting from a cursory survey or derived from a casual selection of excerpts. They bring no manner of support to a monstrous and preposterous imputation which has been cast upon their author ; the charge of having been concerned in a miserably malignant and stupid attempt at satire under the form of a formless and worthless drama called *Histrionastix* ;¹ though his partnership in another anonymous play—a semi-romantic semi-satirical comedy called *Jack Drum's Entertainment*—is very much more plausibly supportable by comparison of special phrases as well as of

¹ This abortion of letters is such a very mooncalf, begotten by malice on idiocy, that no human creature above the intellectual level of its author will ever dream of attempting to decipher the insignificant significance which may possibly—though improbably—lie latent under the opaque veil of its inarticulate virulence.

general style with sundry mannerisms as well as with the habitual turn of speech in Marston's acknowledged comedies. There is a certain incomposite and indigestive vigour in the language of this play which makes the attribution of a principal share in its authorship neither utterly discreditable to Marston nor absolutely improbable in itself; and the satire aimed at Ben Jonson, if not especially relevant to the main action, is at all events less incongruous and preposterous in its relation to the rest of the work than the satirical or controversial part of Dekker's *Satiromastix*. But on the whole, if this play be Marston's, it seems to me the rudest and the poorest he has left us, except perhaps the comedy of *What you Will*, in which several excellent and suggestive situations are made less of than they should have been, and a good deal of promising comic invention is wasted for want of a little more care and a little more conscience in cultivation of material and composition of parts. The satirical references to Jonson are more pointed and effective in this comedy than in either of the two plays last mentioned; but its best claim to remembrance is to be sought in the admirable soliloquy which relates the seven years' experience of the student and his spaniel. Marston is too often heaviest when he would and should be lightest—owing apparently to a certain infusion of contempt for light comedy as something rather beneath him, not wholly worthy of his austere and ambitious capacity. The parliament of pages in this play is a diverting interlude of farce, though a mere irrelevance and impediment to the action; but the boys are less amusing than their compeers in the anonymous comedy of *Sir Giles Goosecap*, first published in the year preceding: a work of

genuine humour and invention, excellent in style if somewhat infirm in construction, for a reprint of which we are indebted to the previous care of Marston's present editor. Far be it from me to intrude on the barren and boggy province of hypothetical interpretation and controversial commentary ; but I may observe in passing that the original of Simplicius Faber in *What you Will* must surely have been the same hanger-on or sycophant of Ben Jonson's who was caricatured by Dekker in his *Satiromastix* under the name of Asinius Bubo. The gross assurance of self-complacent duncery, the apish arrogance and imitative dogmatism of reflected self-importance and authority at second hand, are presented in either case with such identity of tone and colouring that we can hardly imagine the satire to have been equally applicable to two contemporary satellites of the same imperious and masterful egoist.

That the same noble poet and high-souled humourist was not responsible for the offence given to Caledonian majesty in the comedy of *Eastward Ho*, the authentic word of Jonson would be sufficient evidence ; but I am inclined to think it a matter of almost certain likelihood—if not of almost absolute proof—that Chapman was as innocent as Jonson of a jest for which Marston must be held responsible—though scarcely, I should imagine, blamable at the present day by the most rabid of Scottish provincialists. In the last scene of *The Malcontent* a court lady says to an infamous old hanger-on of the court—‘ And is not Signor St. Andrew a gallant fellow now ? ’ to which the old hag replies—‘ Honour and he agree as well together as a satin suit and woollen stockings.’ The famous passage in the comedy which appeared a year later must have been far less offensive to the

most nervous patriotism than this ; and the impunity of so gross an insult, so obviously and obtrusively offered, to the new knightships and lordships of King James's venal chivalry and parasitic nobility, may naturally have encouraged the satirist to repeat his stroke next year—and must have astounded his retrospection, when he found himself in prison, and under threat of worse than imprisonment, together with his unoffending associates in an admirable and inoffensive comedy. It is impossible to suppose that he would not have come forward to assume the responsibility of his own words—as it is impossible to imagine that Jonson or Chapman would have given up his accomplice to save himself. But the law of the day would probably have held them all responsible alike.

In the same year as *Eastward Ho* appeared the best and completest piece of work which we owe to the single hand of Marston. A more brilliant and amusing play than *The Dutch Courtesan*, better composed, better constructed, and better written, it would be difficult to discover among the best comic and romantic works of its incomparable period. The slippery and sanguinary strumpet who gives its name to the play is sketched with such admirable force and freedom of hand as to suggest the existence of an actual model who may unconsciously have sat for the part under the scrutiny of eyes as keen and merciless as ever took notes for a savagely veracious caricature—or for an unscrupulously moral exposure. The jargon in which her emotions are expressed is as Shakespearean in its breadth and persistency as that of Dr. Caius or Captain Fluellen ; but the reality of those emotions is worthy of a less farcical vehicle for the expression of such natural craft and

passion. The sisters, Beatrice and Crispinella, seem at first too evidently imitated from the characters of Aurelia and Phœnixella in the earliest surviving comedy of Ben Jonson ; but the ‘comedy daughter,’ as Dickens (or Skimpole) would have expressed it, is even more coarsely and roughly drawn than in the early sketch of the more famous dramatist. On the other hand, it must be allowed—though it may not be recognised without a certain sense of surprise—that the nobler and purer type of womanhood or girlhood which we owe to the hand of Marston is far above comparison with any which has been accomplished or achieved by the studious and vehement elaboration of Ben Jonson’s. The servility of subservience which that great dramatist exacts from his typically virtuous women—from the abject and anaemic wife of a Corvino or a Fitzdottrel—is a quality which could not coexist with the noble and loving humility of Marston’s Beatrice. The admirable scene in which she is brought face to face with the impudent pretensions of the woman who asserts herself to have been preferred by the betrothed lover of the expectant bride is as pathetic and impressive as it is lifelike and original ; and even in the excess of gentleness and modesty which prompts the words—‘I will love you the better ; I cannot hate what he affected’—there is nothing less noble or less womanly than in the subsequent reply to the harlot’s repeated taunts and inventions of insult. ‘He did not ill not to love me, but sure he did not well to mock me : gentle minds will pity, though they cannot love ; yet peace and my love sleep with him.’ The powerful soliloquy which closes the scene expresses no more than the natural emotion of the man who has received so lovely a revelation

of his future bride's invincible and single-hearted love :

Cannot that woman's evil, jealousy,
Despite disgrace, nay, which is worse, contempt,
Once stir thy faith ?

Coarse as is often the language of Marston's plays and satires, the man was not coarse-minded—not gross of spirit nor base of nature—who could paint so delicately and simply a figure so beautiful in the tenderness of its purity.

The farcical underplot of this play is worthy of Molière in his broader mood of farce. Hardly any Jourdain or Pourceaugnac, any George Dandin or Comtesse d'Escarbagnas of them all, undergoes a more grotesque experience or plays a more ludicrous part than is devised for Mr. and Mrs. Mulligrub by the ingenuity of the indefatigable Coccoledemoy—a figure worthy to stand beside any of the tribe of Mascarille as *fourbum imperator*. The animation and variety of inventive humour which keep the reader's laughing attention awake and amused throughout these adventurous scenes of incident and intrigue are not more admirable than the simplicity and clearness of evolution or composition which recall and rival the classic masterpieces of Latin and French comedy. There is perhaps equal fertility of humour, but there certainly is not equal harmony of structure in the play which Marston published next year—*Parasitaster, or the Fawn*; a name probably suggested by that of Ben Jonson's *Poetaster*, in which the author had himself been the subject of a greater man's rage and ridicule. The wealth and the waste of power displayed and paraded in this comedy are equally admirable and lamentable; for the brilliant effect of its various episodes and interludes is not more

obvious than the eclipse of the central interest, the collapse of the serious design; which results from the agglomeration of secondary figures and the alternations of perpetual byplay. Three or four better plays might have been made out of the materials here hurled and huddled together into one. The Isabelle of Molière is not more amusing or more delightful in her audacity of resource, in her combination of loyalty with duplicity, innocence with intrigue, than the daring and single-hearted young heroine of this play ; but the *École des Maris* is not encumbered with such a crowd of minor interests and characters, of subordinate humours and complications, as the reader of Marston's comedy finds interposed and intruded between his attention and the main point of interest. He would fain see more of Dulcimel and Tiberio, the ingenious and enterprising princess, the ingenuous and responsive prince ; he is willing to see as much as is shown him of their fathers, the masquerading philosopher and the self-complacent dupe ; Granuffo, the patrician prototype of Captain John Bunsby, may take a seat in the chambers of his memory beside the commander of the Cautious Clara ; the humours of a jealous foul-minded fool and a somewhat audaciously virtuous wife may divert him by the inventive and vigorous exposure of their various revolutions and results ; but the final impression is one of admiring disappointment and possibly ungrateful regret that so much energetic satire and so much valuable time should have been spent on the somewhat nauseous follies of 'sickly knights' and 'vicious braggarts' that the really admirable and attractive parts of the design are cramped and crowded out of room for the due development of their just and requisite proportions.

A more eccentric, uneven, and incomposite piece of work than *The Insatiate Countess* it would be difficult to find in English or in other literature. The opening scene is picturesque and impressive; the closing scene of the serious part is noble and pathetic; but the intervening action is of a kind which too often aims at the tragic and hits the burlesque. The incessant inconstancy of passion which hurries the fantastic heroine through such a miscellaneous multitude of improvised intrigues is rather a comic than a tragic motive for the conduct of a play; and the farcical rapidity with which the puppets revolve makes it impossible for the most susceptible credulity to take any real interest or feel any real belief in the perpetual rotation of their feverish moods and motives, their irrational doings and sufferings. The humour of the underplot constantly verges on horseplay, and is certainly neither delicate nor profound; but there is matter enough for mirth in it to make the reader duly grateful for the patient care and admirable insight which Mr. Bullen has brought to bear upon the really formidable if apparently trivial task of reducing the chaotic corruption and confusion of the text to reasonable form and comprehensible order. William Barkstead, a narrative poet of real merit, and an early minister at the shrine of Shakespeare, has been credited with the authorship of this play: I am inclined to agree with the suggestion of its latest editor—its first editor in any serious sense of the word—that both he and Marston may have had a hand in it. His *Myrrha* belongs to the same rather morbid class of poems as Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and Marston's *Pygmalion's Image*. Of the three Shakespeare's is not more certainly the finest in occasional touches of picturesque poetry than it

is incomparably the most offensive to good taste and natural instinct on the score of style and treatment. Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* can only be classed with these elaborate studies of sensual aberration or excess by those 'who can see no difference between Titian and French photographs.' (I take leave, for once in a way, to quote from a private letter—long since addressed to the present commentator by the most illustrious of writers on art.)

There are some pretty verses and some ingenious touches in Marston's *Entertainment*, offered to Lady Derby by her daughter and son-in-law; but the Latinity of his city pageant can scarcely have satisfied the pupil of Buchanan, unless indeed the reputation of King James's tutor as a Latin versifier or master of prosody has been scandalously usurped under the falsest of pretences: a matter on which I am content to accept the verdict of Landor. His contribution to Sir Robert Chester's problematic volume may perhaps claim the singular distinction of being more incomprehensible, more crabbed, more preposterous, and more inexplicable than any other copy of verses among the 'divers poetical essays—done by the best and chiefest of our modern writers, with their names subscribed to their particular works,' in which Marston has the honour to stand next to Shakespeare; and however far he may be from any pretension to rival the incomparable charm of Shakespeare's opening quatrain—incomparable in its peculiar melody and mystery except with other lyrics of Shakespeare's or of Shelley's—it must, I think, be admitted that an impartial student of both effusions will assign to Marston rather than to Shakespeare the palm of distinction on the score of tortuous obscurity and enigmatic verbiage. It may be—as it seems to me—

equally difficult to make sense of the greater and the lesser poet's riddles and rhapsodies ; but on the whole I cannot think that Shakespeare's will be found so desperately indigestible by the ordinary intelligence of manhood as Marston's. 'The turtles fell to work, and ate each other up,' in a far more comprehensible and reasonable poem of Hood's ; and most readers of Chester's poem and the verses appended to it will be inclined to think that it might have been as well—except for a few lines of Shakespeare's and of Jonson's which we could not willingly spare—if the Phœnix and Turtle had set them the example.

If the apparently apocryphal *Mountebank's Masque* be really the work of Marston—and it is both coarse enough and clever enough to deserve the attribution of his authorship—there is a singular echo in it from the opening of Jonson's *Poetaster*, the furious dramatic satire which blasted for upwards of two centuries the fame or the credit of the poet to whose hand this masque has been hitherto assigned. In it, after a full allowance of rough and ribald jocosity, the presence of a poet becomes manifest with the entrance of an allegoric figure whose declamatory address begins with these words :

Light, I salute thee ; I, Obscurity,
The son of Darkness and forgetful Lethe ;
I, that envy thy brightness, greet thee now,
Enforced by Fate.

Few readers of these lines will forget the verses with which Envy plays prologue to *Poetaster, or his Arraignment* :

Light, I salute thee, but with wounded nerves,
Wishing thy golden splendour pitchy darkness.

Whoever may be the author of this masque, there are two or three couplets well worth remembrance in one of the two versions of its text :

It is a life is never ill
To lie and sleep in roses still.

Who would not hear the nightingale still sing,
Or who grew ever weary of the spring ?
The day must have her night, the spring her fall,
All is divided, none is lord of all.

These verses are worthy of a place in any one of Mr. Bullen's beautiful and delightful volumes of lyrics from Elizabethan song-books ; and higher praise than this no lyrical poet could reasonably desire.

An inoffensive monomaniac, who thought fit to reprint a thing in dramatic or quasi-dramatic form to which I have already referred in passing—*Histrion-mastix, or the Player Whipt*—thought likewise fit to attribute to John Marston, of all men on earth, a share in the concoction of this shapeless and unspeakable piece of nonsense. The fact that one of the puppets in the puppetshow is supposed to represent a sullen scholar, disappointed, impoverished, and virulent, would have suggested to a rational reader that the scribbler who gave vent to the impotence of his rancour in this hopeless ebullition of envious despair had set himself to ape the habitual manner of Jonson and the occasional manner of Marston with about as much success as might be expected from a malignant monkey when attempting to reproduce in his grimaces the expression of human indignation and contempt. But to students of natural or literary history who cannot discern the human from the simious element it suggests that the man

thus imitated must needs have been the imitator of himself ; and the fact that the whole attempt at satire is directed against dramatic poetry—that all the drivelling venom of a dunce's denunciation, all the virulent slaver of his grovelling insolence, is aimed at the stage for which Marston was employed in writing—weighs nothing in the scales of imbecility against the consideration that Marston's or Jonson's manner is here and there more or less closely imitated ; that we catch now and then some such echo of his accent, some such savour of his style, as may be discovered or imagined in the very few scattered lines which show any glimmer of capacity for composition or versification. The eternal theme of envy, invented by Jonson and worked to death by its inventor, was taken up again by Marston and treated with a vigorous acerbity not always unworthy of comparison with Jonson's : the same conception inspired with something of eloquence the malignant idiocy of the satirical dunce who has left us, interred and imbedded in a mass of rubbish, a line or two like these which he has put into the mouth of his patron saint or guardian goddess, the incarnate essence of Envy :

Turn, turn, thou lackey to the wingéd time !
I envy thee in that thou art so slow,
And I so swift to mischief.

But the entire affair is obviously an effusion and an example of the same academic sagacity or lucidity of appreciation which found utterance in other contemporary protests of the universities against the universe. In that abyss of dullness *The Return from Parnassus*, a reader or a diver who persists in his thankless toil will discover this pearl of a fact—that men of culture had no more hesitation in preferring

Watson to Shakespeare than they have in preferring Byron to Shelley. The author of the one deserves to have been the author of the other. Nobody can have been by nature such a fool as to write either : art, education, industry, and study were needful to achieve such composite perfection of elaborate and consummate idiocy.

There is a good deal of bad rubbish, and there is some really brilliant and vigorous writing, in the absurdly named and absurdly constructed comedy of *Jack Drum's Entertainment* ; but in all other points—in plot, incident, and presentation of character—it is so scandalously beneath contempt that I am sorry to recognise the hand of Marston in a play which introduces us to a 'noble father,' the model of knightly manhood and refined good sense, who on the news of a beloved daughter's disappearance instantly proposes to console himself with a heavy drinking bout. No graver censure can be passed on the conduct of the drama than the admission that this monstrous absurdity is not out of keeping with the rest of it. There is hardly a single character in all its rabble rout of lunatics who behaves otherwise than would beseem a probationary candidate for Bedlam. Yet I fear there is more serious evidence of a circumstantial kind in favour of the theory which would saddle the fame of Marston with the charge of its authorship than such as depends on peculiarities of metre and eccentricities of phrase. Some other poet—though I know of none such—may have accepted and adopted his theory that 'vengeance' must count in verse as a word of three syllables : I can hardly believe that the fancy would sound sweet in any second man's ear ; but this speciality is not more characteristic than other and more important

qualities of style—the peculiar abruptness, the peculiar inflation, the peculiar crudity—which denote this comedy as apparently if not evidently Marstonian. On the other hand, if it were indeed his, it is impossible to conjecture why his name should have been withheld from the title-page ; and it must not be forgotten that even our own day is not more fertile than was Marston's in the generation of that slavish cattle which has always since the age of Horace fed ravenously and thievishly on the pasture-land of every poet who has discovered or reclaimed a field or a province of his own.

But our estimate of John Marston's rank or regiment in the noble army of contemporary poets will not be in any way affected by acceptance or rejection of any apocryphal addition to the canon of his writings. For better and for worse, the orthodox and undisputed roll of them will suffice to decide that question beyond all chance of intelligent or rational dispute. His rank is high in his own regiment ; and the colonel of that regiment is Ben Jonson. At first sight he may seem rather to belong to that brighter and more famous one which has Webster among its captains, Dekker among its lieutenants, Heywood among its privates, and Shakespeare at its head. Nor did he by any means follow the banner of Jonson with such automatic fidelity as that imperious martinet of genius was wont to exact from those who came to be ' sealed of the tribe of Ben.' A rigid critic—a critic who should push rigidity to the verge of injustice—might say that he was one of those recruits in literature whose misfortune it is to fall between two stools—to halt between two courses. It is certain that he never thoroughly mastered either the cavalry drill of Shakespeare or the infantry drill of Jonson. But it is no

less certain that the few finest passages which attest the power and the purity of his genius as a poet are above comparison with any such examples of tragic poetry as can be attributed with certainty or with plausibility to the hand which has left us no acknowledged works in that line except *Sejanus his Fall* and *Catiline his Conspiracy*. It is superfluous to add that *Volpone* was an achievement only less far out of his reach than *Hamlet*. But this is not to say or to imply that he does not deserve an honourable place among English poets. His savage and unblushing violence or vehemence of satire has no taint of gloating or morbid prurience in the turbid flow of its fitful and furious rhetoric. The restless rage of his invective is as far as human utterance can find itself from the cynical infidelity of an Iago. Of him we may say with more rational confidence what was said of that more potent and more truculent satirist :

An honest man he is, and hates the slime
That sticks on filthy deeds.

We may wish that he had not been so much given to trampling and stamping on that slime as to evoke such malodorous exhalations as infect the lower and shallower reaches of the river down which he proceeds to steer us with so strenuous a hand. But it is in a spirit of healthy disgust, not of hankering delight, that he insists on calling the indignant attention of his readers to the baser and fouler elements of natural or social man as displayed in the vicious exuberance or eccentricity of affectation or of self-indulgence. His real interest and his real sympathies are reserved for the purer and nobler types of womanhood and manhood. In his first extant tragedy, crude and fierce and coarse and awkward as is the general

treatment of character and story, the sketch of Mellida is genuinely beautiful in its pathetic and subdued simplicity ; though certainly no such tender and gentle figure was ever engraved in a stranger or less attractive setting. There is an odd mixture of care and carelessness in the composition of his plays which is exemplified by the fact that another personage in the first part of the same dramatic poem was announced to reappear in the second part as a more important and elaborate figure ; but this second part opens with the appearance of his assassin, red-handed from the murder : and the two parts were published in the same year. And indeed, except in *Parasitaster* and *The Dutch Courtesan*, a general defect in his unassisted plays is the headlong confusion of plot, the helter-skelter violence of incident, which would hardly have been looked for in the work of a professional and practised hand. *What you Will* is modestly described as ' a slight-writ play ' : but slight and slovenly are not the same thing ; nor is simplicity the equivalent of incoherence. I have already observed that Marston is apt to be heaviest when he aims at being lightest ; not, like Ben Jonson, through a laborious and punctilious excess of conscience which is unwilling to let slip any chance of effect, to let pass any detail of presentation ; but rather, we are tempted to suspect, through a sardonic sense of scorn for the perfunctory task on which his ambitious and impatient hand is for the time employed. Now and then, however—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say once or twice—a gayer note is struck with a lighter touch than usual : as for instance in the excellent parody of Lylly put into the mouth of an idiot in the first scene of the fifth act of the first part of *Antonio and Mellida*. ' You know, the stone

called *lapis*, the nearer it comes to the fire, the hotter it is ; and the bird which the geometers call *avis*, the further it is from the earth, the nearer it is to the heaven ; and love, the nigher it is to the flame, the more remote (there's a word, remote !) the more remote it is from the frost.' Shakespeare and Scott have condescended to caricature the style or the manner of the inventor of euphuism : I cannot think their burlesque of his elaborate and sententious triviality so happy, so humorous, or so exact as this. But it is not on his capacity as a satirist or humourist, it is on his occasionally triumphant success as a serious or tragic poet, that the fame of Marston rests assuredly established. His intermittent power to rid himself for awhile of his besetting faults, and to acquire or assume for a moment the very excellences most incompatible with these, is as extraordinary for the completeness as for the transience of its successful effects. The brief fourth act of *Antonio and Mellida* is the most astonishing and bewildering production of belated human genius that ever distracted or discomfited a student. Verses more delicately beautiful followed by verses more simply majestic than these have rarely if ever given assurance of eternity to the fame of any but a great master in song :

Conceit you me : as having clasped a rose
Within my palm, the rose being ta'en away,
My hand retains a little breath of sweet,
So may man's trunk, his spirit slipped away,
Hold still a faint perfume of his sweet guest.
'Tis so : for when discursive powers fly out,
And roam in progress through the bounds of heaven,
The soul itself gallops along with them
As chieftain of this winged troop of thought,
Whilst the dull lodge of spirit standeth waste
Until the soul return.

Then follows a passage of sheer gibberish ; then a dialogue of the noblest and most dramatic eloquence ; then a chaotic alternation of sense and nonsense, bad Italian and mixed English, abject farce and dignified rhetoric, spirited simplicity and bombastic jargon. It would be more and less than just to take this act as a sample or a symbol of the author's usual way of work ; but I cannot imagine that a parallel to it, for evil and for good, could be found in the works of any other writer.

The Muse of this poet is no maiden of such pure and august beauty as entralls us with admiration of Webster's ; she has not the gipsy brightness and vagrant charm of Dekker's, her wild soft glances and flashing smiles and fading traces of tears ; she is no giddy girl, but a strong woman with fine irregular features, large and luminous eyes, broad intelligent forehead, eyebrows so thick and close together that detraction might call her beetle-browed, powerful mouth and chin, fine contralto voice (with an occasional stammer), expression alternately repellent and attractive, but always striking and sincere. No one has ever found her lovely ; but there are times when she has a fascination of her own which fairer and more famous singers might envy her ; and the friends she makes are as sure to be constant as she, for all her occasional roughness and coarseness, is sure to be loyal in the main to the nobler instincts of her kind and the loftier traditions of her sisterhood.

THOMAS MIDDLETON

IF it be true, as we are told on high authority, that the greatest glory of England is her literature and the greatest glory of English literature is its poetry, it is not less true that the greatest glory of English poetry lies rather in its dramatic than its epic or its lyric triumphs. The name of Shakespeare is above the names even of Milton and Coleridge and Shelley : and the names of his comrades in art and their immediate successors are above all but the highest names in any other province of our song. There is such an overflowing life, such a superb exuberance of abounding and exulting strength, in the dramatic poetry of the half-century extending from 1590 to 1640, that all other epochs of English literature seem as it were but half awake and half alive by comparison with this generation of giants and of gods. There is more sap in this than in any other branch of the national bay-tree : it has an energy in fertility which reminds us rather of the forest than the garden or the park. It is true that the weeds and briars of the underwood are but too likely to embarrass and offend the feet of the rangers and the gardeners who trim the level flower-plots or preserve the domestic game of enclosed and ordered lowlands in the tamer demesnes of literature. The sun is strong and the wind sharp in the climate which reared the fellows and the followers of Shakespeare. The extreme inequality and roughness of the ground must also be

taken into account when we are disposed, as I for one have often been disposed, to wonder beyond measure at the apathetic ignorance of average students in regard of the abundant treasure to be gathered from this wildest and most fruitful province in the poetic empire of England. And yet, since Charles Lamb threw open its gates to all comers in the ninth year of the nineteenth century, it cannot but seem strange that comparatively so few should have availed themselves of the entry to so rich and royal an estate. The subsequent labours of Mr. Dyce made the rough ways plain and the devious paths straight for all serious and worthy students. And now again Mr. Bullen has taken up a task than which none more arduous and important, none worthier of thanks and praise, can be undertaken by an English scholar. In his beautiful and valuable edition of Marlowe there are but two points to which exception may be taken. It was, I think, a fault of omission to exclude the apocryphal play of *Lust's Dominion* from a place in the appendix: it was, I am certain, a fault of commission to admit instead of it the much bepuffed and very puffy rubbish of the late Mr. Horne. That clever, versatile, and energetic writer never went so far out of his depth, or floundered so pitifully in such perilous waters, as when he ventured to put verses of his own into the mouth of Christopher Marlowe. These errors we must all hope to see rectified in a second issue of the text: and meantime we can but welcome with all possible gratitude and applause the magnificent series of old plays by unknown writers which we owe to the keen research and the fine appreciation of Marlowe's latest editor. Of these I may find some future occasion to speak: my present business is with the admirable poet who

has been promoted to the second place in Mr. Bullen's collection of the English dramatists.

The selection of Middleton for so distinguished a place of honour may probably not approve itself to the judgment of all experts in dramatic literature. Charles Lamb, as they will all remember, would have advised the editor 'to begin with the collected plays of Heywood'; which as yet, like the plays of Dekker and of Chapman, remain unedited in any serious or scholarly sense of the term. The existing reprints merely reproduce, without adequate elucidation or correction, the corrupt and chaotic text of the worst early editions: while Middleton has for upwards of half a century enjoyed the privilege denied to men who are usually accounted his equals if not his superiors in poetic if not in dramatic genius. Even for an editor of the ripest learning and the highest ability there is comparatively little to do where Mr. Dyce has been before him in the field. However, we must all give glad and grateful welcome to a new edition of a noble poet who has never yet received his full meed of praise and justice: though our gratitude and our gladness may be quickened and dilated by the proverbial sense of further favours to come.

The first word of modern tribute to the tragic genius of Thomas Middleton was not spoken by Charles Lamb. Four years before the appearance of the priceless volume which established his fame for ever among all true lovers of English poetry by copious excerpts from five of his most characteristic works, Walter Scott, in a note on the fifty-sixth stanza of the second fytte of the metrical romance of *Sir Tristrem*, had given a passing word of recognition to the 'horribly striking' power of 'some passages' in Middleton's masterpiece: which was first

reprinted eleven years later, in the fourth volume of Dilke's Old Plays. Lamb, surprisingly enough, has given not a single extract from that noble tragedy : it was reserved for Leigh Hunt, when speaking of its author, to remark that 'there is one character of his (De Flores in *The Changeling*) which, for effect at once tragical, probable, and poetical, surpasses anything I know of in the drama of domestic life.' The praise is not a whit too high ; the truth could not have been better said.

The play with which Mr. Bullen, altering the arrangement adopted by Mr. Dyce, opens his edition of Middleton, is a notable example of the best and the worst qualities which distinguish or disfigure the romantic comedy of the Shakespearean age. The rude and reckless composition, the rough intrusion of savourless farce, the bewildering combinations of incident and the far more bewildering fluctuations of character—all the inconsistencies, incongruities, incoherences of the piece are forgotten when the reader remembers and reverts to the passages of exquisite and fascinating beauty which relieve and redeem the utmost errors of negligence and haste. To find anything more delightful, more satisfying in its pure and simple perfection of loveliness, we must turn to the very best examples of Shakespeare's youthful work. Nay, it must be allowed that in one or two of the master's earliest plays—in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for instance—we shall find nothing comparable for charm and sincerity of sweet and passionate fancy with such enchanting verses as these :

O happy persecution, I embrace thee
 With an unfettered soul ! So sweet a thing
 It is to sigh upon the rack of love,

Where each calamity is groaning witness
 Of the poor martyr's faith. I never heard
 Of any true affection, but 'twas nipt
 With care, that, like the caterpillar, eats
 The leaves off the spring's sweetest book, the rose.
 Love, bred on earth, is often nursed in hell :
 By rote it reads woe, ere it learn to spell.

Again : the 'secure tyrant, but unhappy lover,' whose prisoner and rival has thus expressed his triumphant resignation, is counselled by his friend to 'go laugh and lie down,' as not having slept for three nights ; but answers, in words even more delicious than his supplanter's :

Alas, how can I ? he that truly loves
Burns out the day in idle fantasies ;
 And when the lamb bleating doth bid good night
 Unto the closing day, then tears begin
 To keep quick time unto the owl, whose voice
 Shrieks like the bellman in the lover's ears :
 Love's eye the jewel of sleep, O, seldom wears !
 The early lark is wakened from her bed,
 Being only by love's plaints disquieted ;
 And, singing in the morning's ear, she weeps,
 Being deep in love, at lovers' broken sleeps :
 But say a golden slumber chance to tie
 With silken strings the cover of love's eye,
 Then dreams, magician-like, mocking present
 Pleasures, whose fading leaves more discontent.

Perfect in music, faultless in feeling, exquisite in refined simplicity of expression, this passage is hardly more beautiful and noble than one or two in the play which follows. *The Phoenix* is a quaint and homely compound of satirical realism in social studies with utopian invention in the figure of an ideal prince, himself a compound of Harun al-Rashid and 'Albert the Good,' who wanders through the play as a detective

in disguise, and appears in his own person at the close to discharge in full the general and particular claims of justice and philanthropy. The whole work is slight and sketchy, primitive if not puerile in parts, but easy and amusing to read ; the confidence reposed by the worthy monarch in noblemen of such unequivocal nomenclature as Lord Proditor, Lusurioso, and Infesto, is one of the signs that we are here still on the debatable borderland between the old Morality and the new Comedy—a province where incarnate vices and virtues are seen figuring and posturing in what can scarcely be called masquerade. But the two fine soliloquies of Phœnix on the corruption of the purity of law (Act i. scene iv.) and the profanation of the sanctity of marriage (Act ii. scene ii.) are somewhat riper and graver in style, with less admixture of rhyme and more variety of cadence, than the lovely verses above quoted. Milton's obligation to the latter passage is less direct than his earlier obligation to a later play of Middleton's, from which he transferred one of the most beautiful as well as most famous images in *Lycidas* : but his early and intimate acquaintance with Middleton had apparently (as Mr. Dyce seems to think¹) left in the ear of the blind old poet a more or less distinct echo from the

¹ Mr. Dyce would no doubt have altered his opinion had he lived to see the evidence adduced by the Director of the New Melpomene Society that the real author of *A Game at Chess* was none other than John Milton himself : whose earliest poems had appeared the year before the publication of that anti-papal satire. This discovery is only less curious and precious than a later revelation which we must accept on the same authority, that *Comus* was written by Sir John Suckling, *Paradise Regained* by Lord Rochester, and *Samson Agonistes* by Elkanah Settle : while on the other hand it may be affirmed with no less confidence that Milton—who never would allow his name to be spelt right on the title-page or under the dedication of any work published by him—owed his immunity from punishment after the Restoration to the admitted fact that he was the real author of Dryden's *Astraea Redux*.

noble opening verses of the dramatist's address to 'reverend and honourable matrimony.'

In *Michaelmas Term* the realism of Middleton's comic style is no longer alloyed or flavoured with poetry or fancy. It is an excellent Hogarthian comedy, full of rapid and vivid incident, of pleasant or indignant humour. Its successor, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, is by far the best play Middleton had yet written, and one of the best he ever wrote. The merit of this and his other good comedies does not indeed consist in any new or subtle study of character, any Shakespearean creation or Jonsonian invention of humours or of men : the spendthrifts and the misers, the courtesans and the dotards, are figures borrowed from the common stock of stage tradition : it is the vivid variety of incident and intrigue, the freshness and ease and vigour of the style, the clear straightforward energy and vivacity of the action, that the reader finds most praiseworthy in the best comic work of such ready writers as Middleton and Dekker. The dialogue has sometimes touches of real humour and flashes of genuine wit : but its readable and enjoyable quality is generally independent of these. Very witty writing may be very dreary reading, for want of natural animation and true dramatic movement : and in these qualities at least the rough and ready work of our old dramatists is seldom if ever deficient.

It is, however, but too probable that the reader's enjoyment may be crossed with a dash of exasperation when he finds a writer of real genius so reckless of fame and self-respect as the pressure of want or the weariness of overwork seems but too often and too naturally to have made too many of the great dramatic journeymen whose powers were half wasted

or half worn out in the struggle for bare bread. No other excuse than this can be advanced for the demerit of Middleton's next comedy. Had the author wished to show how well and how ill he could write at his worst and at his best, he could have given no fairer proof than by the publication of two plays issued under his name in the same year 1608. *The Family of Love* is in my judgment unquestionably and incomparably the worst of Middleton's plays: very coarse, very dull, altogether distasteful and ineffectual. As a religious satire it is so utterly pointless as to leave no impression of any definite folly or distinctive knavery in the doctrine or the practice of the particular sect held up by name to ridicule: an obscure body of feather-headed fanatics, concerning whom we can only be certain that they were decent and inoffensive in comparison with the yelling Yahoos whom the scandalous and senseless license of our own day allows to run and roar about the country unmuzzled and unwhipped.

There is much more merit in the broad comedy of *Your Five Gallants*, a curious burlesque study of manners and morals not generally commendable for imitation. The ingenious and humorous invention which supplies a centre for the picture and a pivot for the action is most singularly identical with the device of a modern detective as recorded by the greatest English writer of his day. 'The Butcher's Story,' told to Dickens by the policeman who had played the part of the innocent young butcher, may be profitably compared by lovers of detective humour with the story of Fitsgrave—a 'thrice worthy' gentleman who under the disguise of a young gull fresh from college succeeds in circumventing and unmasking the five associated swindlers of variously

villainous professions by whom a fair and amiable heiress is beleaguered and befooled. The play is somewhat crude and hasty in construction, but full of life and fun and grotesque variety of humorous event.

The first of Middleton's plays to attract notice from students of a later generation, *A Mad World, my Masters*, if not quite so thoroughly good a comedy as *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, must be allowed to contain the very best comic character ever drawn or sketched by the fertile and flowing pen of its author. The prodigal grandfather, Sir Bounteous Progress, is perhaps the most lifelike figure of a good-humoured and liberal old libertine that ever amused or scandalised a tolerant or intolerant reader. The chief incidents of the action are admirably humorous and ingenious ; but the matrimonial part of the catastrophe is something more than repulsive, and the singular intervention of a real live succubus, less terrible in her seductions than her sister of the *Contes Drolatiques*, can hardly seem happy or seasonable to a generation which knows not King James and his Demonology.

Of the two poets occasionally associated with Middleton in the composition of a play, Dekker seems usually to have taken in hand the greater part, and Rowley the lesser part, of the composite poem engendered by their joint efforts. The style of *The Roaring Girl* is full of Dekker's peculiar mannerisms ; slipshod and straggling metre, incongruous touches or flashes of fanciful or lyrical expression, reckless and awkward inversions, irrational and irrepressible outbreaks of irregular and fitful rhyme. And with all these faults it is more unmistakably the style of a born poet than is the usual style of

Middleton. Dekker would have taken a high place among the finest if not among the greatest of English poets if he had but had the sense of form—the instinct of composition. Whether it was modesty, indolence, indifference, or incompetence, some drawback or shortcoming there was which so far impaired the quality of his strong and delicate genius that it is impossible for his most ardent and cordial admirer to say or think of his very best work that it really does him justice—that it adequately represents the fullness of his unquestionable powers. And yet it is certain that Lamb was not less right than usual when he said that Dekker ‘had poetry enough for anything.’ But he had not constructive power enough for the trade of a playwright—the trade in which he spent so many weary years of ill-requited labour. This comedy in which we first find him associated with Middleton is well written and well contrived, and fairly diverting—especially to an idle or an uncritical reader: though even such an one may suspect that the heroine here represented as a virginal virago must have been in fact rather like Dr. Johnson’s fair friend Bet Flint; of whom the Great Lexicographer ‘used to say that she was generally slut and drunkard; occasionally whore and thief’ (Boswell, May 8, 1781). The parallel would have been more nearly complete if Moll Cutpurse ‘had written her own Life in verse,’ and brought it to Selden or Bishop Hall with a request that he would furnish her with a preface to it.

The plays of Middleton are not so properly divisible into tragic and comic as into realistic and romantic—into plays of which the mainspring is essentially prosaic or photographic, and plays of which the mainspring is principally fanciful or poetical. Two

only of the former class remain to be mentioned : *Anything for a Quiet Life* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. There is very good stuff in the plot or groundwork of the former, but the workmanship is hardly worthy of the material. Mr. Bullen ingeniously and plausibly suggests the partnership of Shirley in this play : but the conception of the character in which he discerns a likeness to the touch of the lesser dramatist is happier and more original than such a comparison would indicate. The young stepmother whose affectation of selfish levity and grasping craft is really designed to cure her husband of his infatuation, and to reconcile him with the son who regards her as his worst enemy, is a figure equally novel, effective, and attractive. The honest shopkeeper and his shrewish wife may remind us again of Dickens by their points of likeness to Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby ; though the reformation of the mercer's jealous vixen is brought about by more humorous and less tragical means than the repentance of the law-stationer's 'little woman.' George the apprentice, through whose wit and energy this happy consummation becomes possible, is a very original and amusing example of the young Londoner of the period. But there is more humour, though very little chastity, in the *Chaste Maid* ; a play of quite exceptional freedom and audacity, and certainly one of the drollest and liveliest that ever broke the bounds of propriety or shook the sides of merriment.

The opening of *More Dissemblers besides Women* is as full at once of comic and of romantic promise as the upshot of the whole is unsatisfactory—a most lame and impotent conclusion. But some of the dialogue is exquisite ; full of flowing music and gentle grace, of ease and softness and fancy and

spirit ; and the part of a poetic or romantic Joseph Surface, as perfect in the praise of virtue as in the practice of vice, is one of Middleton's really fine and happy inventions. In the style of *The Widow* there is no less fluency and facility : it is throughout identical with that of Middleton's other comedies in metre ; a style which has so many points in common with Fletcher's as to make the apocryphal attribution of a share in this comedy to the hand of the greater poet more plausible than many other ascriptions of the kind. I am inclined nevertheless to agree with Mr. Bullen's apparent opinion that the whole credit of this brilliant play may be reasonably assigned to Middleton ; and especially with his remark that the only scene in which any resemblance to the manner of Ben Jonson can be traced by the most determined ingenuity of critical research is more like the work of a pupil than like a hasty sketch of the master's. There is no lack of energetic invention and beautiful versification in another comedy of adventure and intrigue, *No Wit, no Help like a Woman's* : the unpleasant or extravagant quality of certain incidents in the story is partially neutralised or modified by the unfailing charm of a style worthy of Fletcher himself in his ripest and sweetest stage of poetic comedy.

But high above all the works yet mentioned there stands and will stand conspicuous while noble emotion and noble verse have honour among English readers the pathetic and heroic play so memorably appreciated by Charles Lamb, *A Fair Quarrel*. It would be the vainest and emptiest impertinence to offer a word in echo of his priceless and imperishable praise. The delicate nobility of the central conception on which the hero's character depends for its full relief and

development should be enough to efface all remembrance of any defect or default in moral taste, any shortcoming on the æsthetic side of ethics, which may be detected in any slighter or hastier example of the poet's invention. A man must be dull and slow of sympathies indeed who cannot respond in spirit to that bitter cry of chivalrous and manful agony at sense of the shadow of a mother's shame :

*Quench, my spirit,
And out with honour's flaming lights within thee !
Be dark and dead to all respects of manhood !
I never shall have use of valour more.*

Middleton has no second hero like Captain Ager : but where is there another so thoroughly noble and lovable among all the characters of all the dramatists of his time but Shakespeare ?

The part taken by Rowley in this play is easy for any tiro in criticism to verify. The rough and crude genius of that perverse and powerful writer is not seen here by any means at its best. I should say that his call was rather towards tragedy than towards comedy ; that his mastery of severe and serious emotion was more genuine and more natural than his command of satirical or grotesque realism. The tragedy in which he has grappled with the subject afterwards so differently handled in the first and greatest of Landor's tragedies is to me of far more interest and value than such comedies as that which kindled the enthusiasm of a loyal Londoner in the civic sympathies of Lamb. Disfigured as it is towards the close by indulgence in mere horror and brutality after the fashion of Andronicus or Jeronimo, it has more beauty and power and pathos in its best scenes than a reader of his comedies would have expected.

But in the underplot of *A Fair Quarrel* Rowley's besetting faults of coarseness and quaintness, stiffness and roughness, are so flagrant and obtrusive that we cannot avoid a feeling of regret and irritation at such untimely and inharmonious evidence of his partnership with a poet of finer if not of sturdier genius. The same sense of discord and inequality will be aroused on comparison of the worse with the better parts of *The Old Law*. The clumsiness and dullness of the farcical interludes can hardly be paralleled in the rudest and hastiest scenes of Middleton's writing: while the sweet and noble dignity of the finer passages has the stamp of his ripest and tenderest genius on every line and in every cadence. But for sheer bewildering incongruity there is no play known to me which can be compared with *The Mayor of Queenborough*. Here again we find a note so dissonant and discordant in the lighter parts of the dramatic concert that we seem at once to recognise the harsher and hoarser instrument of Rowley. The farce is even more extravagantly and preposterously mis-timed and misplaced than that which disfigures the play just mentioned: but I thoroughly agree with Mr. Bullen's high estimate of the power displayed and maintained throughout the tragic and poetic part of this drama; to which no previous critic has ever vouchsafed a word of due acknowledgment. The story is ugly and unnatural, but its repulsive effect is transfigured or neutralised by the charm of tender or passionate poetry; and it must be admitted that the hideous villainy of Vortiger and Horsus affords an opening for subsequent scenic effects of striking and genuine tragical interest.

The difference between the genius of Middleton and the genius of Dekker could not be better illus-

trated than by comparison of their attempts at political and patriotic allegory. The lazy, slovenly, impatient genius of Dekker flashes out by fits and starts on the reader of the play in which he has expressed his English hatred of Spain and Popery, his English pride in the rout of the Armada, and his English gratitude for the part played by Queen Elizabeth in the crowning struggle of the time : but his most cordial admirer can hardly consider *The Whore of Babylon* a shining or satisfactory example of dramatic art. The play which brought Middleton into prison, and earned for the actors a sum so far beyond parallel as to have seemed incredible till the fullest evidence was procured, is one of the most complete and exquisite works of artistic ingenuity and dexterity that ever excited or offended, enraptured or scandalised an audience of friends or enemies : the only work of English poetry which may properly be called Aristophanic. It has the same depth of civic seriousness, the same earnest ardour and devotion to the old cause of the old country, the same solid fervour of enthusiasm and indignation, which animated the third great poet of Athens against the corruption of art by the sophistry of Euripides and the corruption of manhood by the sophistry of Socrates. The delicate skill of the workmanship can only be appreciated by careful and thorough study ; but that the infusion of poetic fancy and feeling into the generally comic and satiric style is hardly unworthy of the comparison which I have ventured to challenge, I will take but one brief extract for evidence :

Upon those lips, the sweet fresh buds of youth,
The holy dew of prayer lies, like pearl
Dropt from the opening eyelids of the morn
Upon a bashful rose.

Here for once even 'that celestial thief' John Milton has impaired rather than improved the effect of the beautiful phrase borrowed from an earlier and inferior poet. His use of Middleton's exquisite image is not quite so apt—so perfectly picturesque and harmonious—as the use to which it was put by the inventor.

Nothing in the age of Shakespeare is so difficult for an Englishman of our own age to realise as the temper, the intelligence, the serious and refined elevation of an audience which was at once capable of enjoying and applauding the roughest and coarsest kinds of pleasantry, the rudest and crudest scenes of violence, and competent to appreciate the finest and the highest reaches of poetry, the subtlest and the most sustained allusions of ethical or political symbolism. The large and long popularity of an exquisite dramatic or academic allegory such as *Lingua*, which would seem to appeal only to readers of exceptional education, exceptional delicacy of perception, and exceptional quickness of wit, is hardly more remarkable than the popular success of a play requiring such keen constancy of attention, such vivid wakefulness and promptitude of apprehension, as this even more serious than fantastic work of Middleton's. The vulgarity and puerility of all modern attempts at any comparable effect need not be cited to throw into relief the essential finish, the impassioned intelligence, the high spiritual and literary level, of these crowded and brilliant and vehement five acts. Their extreme cleverness, their indefatigable ingenuity, would in any case have been remarkable: but their fullness of active and poetic life gives them an interest far deeper and higher and more permanent than the mere sense of curiosity and wonder.

But if *A Game at Chess* is especially distinguished by its complete and thorough harmony of execution and design, the lack of any such artistic merit in another famous work of Middleton's is such as once more to excite that irritating sense of inequality, irregularity, inconstancy of genius and inconsequence of aim, which too often besets and bewilders the student of our early dramatists. There is poetry enough in *The Witch* to furnish forth a whole generation of poeticules : but the construction or composition of the play, the arrangement and evolution of event, the distinction or development of character, would do less than little credit to a boy of twelve ; who at any rate would hardly have thought of patching up so ridiculous a reconciliation between intending murderers and intended victims as here exceeds in absurdity the chaotic combination of accident and error which disposes of inconvenient or superfluous underlings. But though neither Mr. Dyce nor Mr. Bullen has been at all excessive or unjust in his animadversions on these flagrant faults and follies, neither editor has given his author due credit for the excellence of style, of language and versification, which makes this play readable throughout with pleasure, if not always without impatience. Fletcher himself, the acknowledged master of the style here adopted by Middleton, has left no finer example of metrical fluency and melodious ease. The fashion of dialogue and composition is no doubt rather feminine than masculine : Marlowe and Jonson, Webster and Beaumont, Tourneur and Ford—to cite none but the greatest of authorities in this kind—wrote a firmer if not a freer hand, struck a graver if not a sweeter note of verse : this rapid effluence of easy expression is liable to lapse into conventional efflux

of facile improvisation : but such command of it as Middleton's is impossible to any but a genuine and a memorable poet.

As for the supposed obligations of Shakespeare to Middleton or Middleton to Shakespeare, the imaginary relations of *The Witch* to *Macbeth* or *Macbeth* to *The Witch*, I can only say that the investigation of this subject seems to me as profitable as a research into the natural history of snakes in Iceland. That the editors to whom we owe the miserably defaced and villainously garbled text which is all that has reached us of *Macbeth*, not content with the mutilation of the greater poet, had recourse to the interpolation of a few superfluous and incongruous lines or fragments from the lyric portions of the lesser poet's work—that the players who mangled Shakespeare were the pilferers who plundered Middleton—must be obvious to all but those (if any such yet exist anywhere) who are capable of believing the unspeakably impudent assertion of those mendacious malefactors that they have left us a pure and perfect edition of Shakespeare. These passages are all thoroughly in keeping with the general tone of the lesser work : it would be tautology to add that they are no less utterly out of keeping with the general tone of the other. But in their own way nothing can be finer : they have a tragic liveliness in ghastliness, a grotesque animation of horror, which no other poet has ever conceived or conveyed to us. The difference between Michel Angelo and Goya, Tintoretto and Gustave Doré, does not quite efface the right of the minor artists to existence and remembrance.

The strange and strangely beautiful tragic poem, which could not have come down to us under a stupider or a less appropriate name than that appar-

ently conferred on it by the licenser of *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, must by all evidence of internal and external probability be almost unquestionably assigned to the hand of Middleton. The masterly daring of the stage effect, which cannot or should not be mistaken for the merely theatrical audacity of a headlong impressionist at any price, is not more characteristic of the author than the tender and passionate fluency of the flawless verse. The rather eccentric intermittency of the supernatural action is a no less obviously plausible reason for assigning it to the creator of so realistic a witch and so singular a succubus. But such a dramatic poem as this would be a conspicuous jewel in the crown of any but a supremely great dramatist and poet. And the musical or metrical harmony of the verse, imperceptible as it may be or rather must always be to the long-eared dunces who can only think to hear through their clumsy fingers, is so like Fletcher's as to suggest that if any part of Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII.* is attributable to a lesser hand than his it may far more plausibly be assigned to Middleton's than to Fletcher's. Had it or could it have been the work of Fletcher, the clamorous and multitudinous satellites who preferred him with such furious fatuity of acclamation to so inconsiderable a rival as Shakespeare would hardly have abstained from reclaiming it on behalf of the great poet whom it pleased their imbecility to set so far above one so immeasurably and so unutterably greater.

The tragedy of *Women beware Women*, whether or not it be accepted as the masterpiece of Middleton, is at least an excellent example of the facility and fluency and equable promptitude of style which all students will duly appreciate and applaud in the

riper and completer work of this admirable poet. It is full to overflowing of noble eloquence, of inventive resource and suggestive effect, of rhetorical affluence and theatrical ability. The opening or exposition of the play is quite masterly : and the scene in which the forsaken husband is seduced into consolation by the temptress of his wife is worthy of all praise for the straightforward ingenuity and the serious delicacy by which the action is rendered credible and the situation endurable. But I fear that few or none will be found to disagree with my opinion that no such approbation or tolerance can be reasonably extended so as to cover or condone the offences of either the underplot or the upshot of the play. The one is repulsive beyond redemption by elegance of style, the other is preposterous beyond extenuation on the score of logical or poetical justice. Those who object on principle to solution by massacre must object in consistency to the conclusions of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* : nor are the results of Webster's tragic invention more questionable or less inevitable than the results of Shakespeare's : but the dragnet of murder which gathers in the characters at the close of this play is as promiscuous in its sweep as that cast by Cyril Tourneur over the internecine shoal of sharks who are hauled in and ripped open at the close of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Had Middleton been content with the admirable subject of his main action, he might have given us a simple and unimpeachable masterpiece : and even as it is he has left us a noble and memorable work. It is true that the irredeemable infamy of the leading characters degrades and deforms the nature of the interest excited : the good and gentle old mother whose affectionate simplicity is so gracefully and attract-

ively painted passes out of the story and drops out of the list of actors just when some redeeming figure is most needed to assuage the dreariness of disgust with which we follow the fortunes of so meanly criminal a crew : and the splendid eloquence of the only other respectable person in the play is not of itself sufficient to make a living figure, rather than the mere mouthpiece for indignant emotion, of so subordinate and inactive a character as the Cardinal. The lower comedy of the play is identical in motive with that which defaces the master-work of Ford : more stupid and offensive is hardly could be. But the high comedy of the scene between Livia and the Widow is as fine as the best work in that kind left us by the best poets and humourists of the Shakespearean age ; it is not indeed unworthy of the comparison with Chaucer's which it suggested to the all but impeccable judgment of Charles Lamb.

The lack of moral interest and sympathetic attraction in the characters and the story, which has been noted as the principal defect in the otherwise effective composition of *Women beware Women*, is an objection which cannot be brought against the graceful tragic-comedy of *The Spanish Gipsy*. Whatever is best in the tragic or in the romantic part of this play bears the stamp of Middleton's genius alike in the sentiment and the style. 'The code of modern morals,' to borrow a convenient phrase from Shelley, may hardly incline us to accept as plausible or as possible the repentance and the redemption of so brutal a ruffian as Roderigo : but the vivid beauty of the dialogue is equal to the vivid interest of the situation which makes the first act one of the most striking in any play of the time. The double action has some leading points in common with two of Fletcher's,

which have nothing in common with each other : Merione in *The Queen of Corinth* is less interesting than Clara, but the vagabonds of *Beggars' Bush* are more amusing than Rowley's or Middleton's. The play is somewhat deficient in firmness or solidity of construction : it is, if such a phrase be permissible, one of those half-baked or underdone dishes of various and confused ingredients, in which the cook's or the baker's hurry has impaired the excellent materials of wholesome bread and savoury meat. The splendid slovens who served their audience with spiritual work in which the gods had mixed 'so much of earth, so much of heaven, and such impetuous blood'—the generous and headlong purveyors who lavished on their daily provision of dramatic fare such wealth of fine material and such prodigality of superfluous grace—the foremost followers of Marlowe and of Shakespeare were too prone to follow the impetuous example of the first rather than the severe example of the second. There is perhaps not one of them—and Middleton assuredly is not one—whom we can reasonably imagine capable of the patience and self-respect which induced Shakespeare to rewrite the triumphantly popular parts of Romeo, of Falstaff, and of Hamlet, with an eye to the literary perfection and permanence of work which in its first light outline had won the crowning suffrage of immediate or spectacular applause.

The rough and ready hand of Rowley may be traced, not indeed in the more high-toned passages, but in many of the most animated scenes of *The Spanish Gipsy*. In the most remarkable of the ten masques or interludes which appear among the collected works of Middleton the two names are again associated. To the freshness, liveliness, and spirited

ingenuity of this little allegorical comedy Mr. Bullen has done ample justice in his excellent critical introduction. *The Inner-Temple Masque*, less elaborate than *The World Tost at Tennis*, shows no lack of homely humour and invention: and in the others there is as much waste of fine flowing verse and facile fancy as ever excited the rational regret of a modern reader at the reckless profusion of literary power which the great poets of the time were content to lavish on the decoration or exposition of an ephemeral pageant. Of Middleton's other minor works, apocryphal or genuine, I will only say that his authorship of *Microcynicon*—a dull and crabbed imitation of Marston's worst work as a satirist—seems to me utterly incredible. A lucid and melodious fluency of style is the mark of all his metrical writing: and this stupid piece of obscure and clumsy jargon could have been the work of no man endowed with more faculty of expression than informs or modulates the whine of an average pig. Nor is it rationally conceivable that the Thomas Middleton who soiled some reams of paper with what he was pleased to consider or to call a paraphrase of the 'Wisdom of Solomon' can have had anything but a poet's name in common with a poet. This name is not like that of the great writer whose name is attached to *The Transformed Metamorphosis*: there can hardly have been two Cyril Tourneurs in the field, but there may well have been half a dozen Thomas Middletons. And Tourneur's abortive attempt at allegoric discourse is but a preposterous freak of prolonged eccentricity: this paraphrase is simply a tideless and interminable sea of limitless and inexhaustible drivel. There are three reasons—two of them considerable, but the third conclusive—for assigning to Middleton the two

satirical tracts in the style of Nash, or rather of Dekker, which appeared in the same year with his initials subscribed to their prefatory addresses. Mr. Dyce thought they were written by the poet whose ready verse and realistic humour are both well represented in their text : Mr. Bullen agrees with Mr. Dyce in thinking that they are the work of Middleton. And Mr. Carew Hazlitt thinks that they are not.

No such absolute and final evidence as this can be adduced in favour or disfavour of the theory which would saddle the reputation of Middleton with the authorship of a dull and disjointed comedy, the work (it has hitherto been supposed) of the German substitute for Shakespeare. Middleton has no doubt left us more crude and shapeless plays than *The Puritan*; none, in my opinion,—excepting always his very worst authentic example of farce or satire, *The Family of Love*—so heavy and so empty and so feeble. If it must be assigned to any author of higher rank than the new Shakspere, I would suggest that it is much more like Rowley's than like Middleton's worst work. Of the best qualities which distinguish either of these writers as poet or as humourist, it has not the shadow or the glimmer of a vestige.

In the last and the greatest work which bears their united names—a work which should suffice to make either name immortal if immortality were other than an accidental attribute of genius—the very highest capacity of either poet is seen at its very best. There is more of mere poetry, more splendour of style and vehemence of verbal inspiration, in the work of other poets than writing for the stage : the two masterpieces of Webster are higher in tone at their highest, more imaginative and more fascinating

in their expression of terrible or of piteous truth : there are more superb harmonies, more glorious raptures of ardent and eloquent music, in the sometimes unsurpassed and unsurpassable poetic passion of Cyril Tourneur. But even Webster's men seem but splendid sketches, as Tourneur's seem but shadowy or fiery outlines, beside the perfect and living figure of De Flores. The man is so horribly human, so fearfully and wonderfully natural, in his single-hearted brutality of devotion, his absolute absorption of soul and body by one consuming force of passionately cynical desire, that we must go to Shakespeare for an equally original and an equally unquestionable revelation of indubitable truth. And in no play by Beaumont and Fletcher is the concord between the two partners more singularly complete in unity of spirit and of style than throughout the tragic part of this play. The underplot from which it most unluckily and absurdly derives its title is very stupid, rather coarse, and almost vulgar : but the two great parts of Beatrice and De Flores are equally consistent, coherent and sustained, in the scenes obviously written by Middleton and in the scenes obviously written by Rowley. The subordinate part taken by Middleton in Dekker's play of *The Honest Whore* is difficult to discern from the context or to verify by inner evidence : though some likeness to his realistic or photographic method may be admitted as perceptible in the admirable picture of Bellafront's morning reception at the opening of the second act of the first part. But here we may assert with fair confidence that the first and the last scenes of the play bear the indisputable sign-manual of William Rowley. His vigorous and vivid genius, his somewhat hard and curt directness of style and manner, his clear and

trenchant power of straightforward presentation or exposition, may be traced in every line as plainly as the hand of Middleton must be recognised in the main part of the tragic action intervening. To Rowley therefore must be assigned the very high credit of introducing and of dismissing with adequate and even triumphant effect the strangely original tragic figure which owes its fullest and finest development to the genius of Middleton. To both poets alike must unqualified and equal praise be given for the subtle simplicity of skill with which they make us appreciate the fatal and foreordained affinity between the ill-favoured, rough-mannered, broken-down gentleman, and the headstrong, unscrupulous, unobservant girl whose very abhorrence of him serves only to fling her down from her high station of haughty beauty into the very clutch of his ravenous and pitiless passion. Her cry of horror and astonishment at first perception of the price to be paid for a service she had thought to purchase with mere money is so wonderfully real in its artless and ingenuous sincerity that Shakespeare himself could hardly have bettered it:

Why, 'tis impossible thou canst be so wicked,
And shelter such a cunning cruelty,
To make his death the murderer of my honour !

That note of incredulous amazement that the man whom she has just instigated to the commission of murder 'can be so wicked' as to have served her ends for any end of his own beyond the pay of a professional assassin is a touch worthy of the greatest dramatist that ever lived. The perfect simplicity of expression is as notable as the perfect innocence of her surprise; the candid astonishment of a nature

absolutely incapable of seeing more than one thing or holding more than one thought at a time. That she, the first criminal, should be honestly shocked as well as physically horrified by revelation of the real motive which impelled her accomplice into crime gives a lurid streak of tragic humour to the lifelike interest of the scene ; as the pure infusion of spontaneous poetry throughout redeems the whole work from the charge of vulgar subservience to a vulgar taste for the presentation or the contemplation of criminal horror. Instances of this happy and natural nobility of instinct abound in the casual expressions which give grace and animation always, but never any touch of rhetorical transgression or florid superfluity, to the brief and trenchant swordplay of the tragic dialogue.

That sigh would fain have utterance : take pity on 't,
And lend it a free word : 'las, how it labours
For liberty ! I hear the murmur yet
Beat at your bosom.

The wording of this passage is sufficient to attest the presence and approve the quality of a poet : the manner and the moment of its introduction would be enough to show the instinctive and inborn insight of a natural dramatist. As much may be said of the few words which give us a ghostly glimpse of supernatural terror :

Ha ! what art thou that tak'st away the light
Betwixt that star and me ? I dread thee not :
'Twas but a mist of conscience.

But the real power and genius of the work cannot be shown by extracts—not even by such extracts as these. His friend and colleague Dekker shows to better advantage by the process of selection : hardly

one of his plays leaves so strong and sweet an impression of its general and complete excellence as of separate scenes or passages of tender and delicate imagination or emotion beyond the reach of Middleton : but the tragic unity and completeness of conception which distinguish this masterpiece will be sought in vain among the less firm and solid figures of his less serious and profound invention. Had *The Changeling* not been preserved, we should not have known Middleton : as it is, we are more than justified in asserting that a critic who denies him a high place among the poets of England must be not merely ignorant of the qualities which involve a right or confer a claim to this position, but incapable of curing his ignorance by any process of study. The rough and rapid work which absorbed too much of this poet's time and toil seems almost incongruous with the impression made by the noble and thoughtful face, so full of gentle dignity and earnest composure, in which we recognise the graver and loftier genius of a man worthy to hold his own beside all but the greatest of his age. And that age was the age of Shakespeare.

WILLIAM ROWLEY

OF all the poets and humourists who lit up the London stage for half a century of unequalled glory, William Rowley was the most thoroughly loyal Londoner : the most evidently and proudly mindful that he was a citizen of no mean city. I have always thought that this must have been the conscious or unconscious source of the strong and profound interest which his very remarkable and original genius had the good fortune to evoke from the sympathies of Charles Lamb. That divine cockney, if the word may be used—and ‘why in the name of Glory,’ to borrow the phrase of another immortal fellow-townsman, should it not be?—as a term of no less honour than Yorkshireman or Northumbrian, Cornishman or Welshman, has lavished upon Rowley such cordial and such manfully sympathetic praise as would suffice to preserve and to immortalize the name of a far lesser man and a far feebler workman in tragedy or comedy, poetry or prose.

If Lamb had known and read the first work published by Rowley, it is impossible to imagine that it would not have been honoured by the tribute of some passing and priceless word. Why it has never been reissued (except in a private reprint for the Percy Society) among the many less deserving and less interesting revivals from the apparently and not really ephemeral literature of its day would be to me an insoluble problem, if I were so ignorant as never to have realised the too obvious fact that chance, pure and

simple chance, guides or misguides the intelligence, and suggests or fails to suggest the duty of scholars and of students who have given time and thought to such far from unimportant or insignificant matters. *A Search for Money, or a Quest for the Wandering Knight Monsieur L'Argent*, is not comparable with the best pamphlets of Nash or of Dekker : a competent reader of those admirable improvisations will at the first opening feel inclined to regard it as a feeble and servile imitation of their quaint and obsolescent manner ; but he will soon find an original and a vigorous vein of native humour in their comrade or their disciple. The seekers after the wandering knight, baffled in their search on shore, are compelled to recognise the sad fact that 'the sea is lunatic, and mad folks keep no money, he would sink if he were there.' The description of an usurer is memorable by its reference to the first great poet of England, among whose followers Rowley is far from the least worthy of honour. 'His visage (or vizard) like the artificial Jew of Malta's nose' brings before the reader in vivid realism the likeness of Alleyn or Burbage as he represented in grotesque and tragic disguise the magnificent figure of Marlowe's creative invention or discovery by dint of genius. (I do not remember the curious verb 'to rand' except in this little book : 'he randed out these sentences' : I presume it to be the first form of 'rant.') The account of St. Paul's in 1609 is very curious and scandalous : 'the very Temple itself (in bare humility) stood without his cap, and so had stood many years, many good folks had spoke for him because he could not speak for himself, and somewhat had been gathered in his behalf, but not half enough to supply his necessity.'

When we pass from 'the Temple' to Westminster Hall we come upon a sample of humour which would be famous if it were the gift of a less ungratefully forgotten hand.

'Here were two brothers at buffets with angels in their fists about the thatch that blew off his house into the other's garden and so spoiled a Hartichoke.'

It should not have been left to a later hand—it should surely have been the privilege of Lamb's or Hazlitt's, and perhaps rather Hazlitt's than even Lamb's—to unearth and to transcribe the quaint and spirited description of Thames watermen 'howling, hollowing, and calling for passengers, as if all the hags in hell had been imprisoned, and begging at the grate, fiends and furies that (God be thanked) could vex the soul but not torment it, yet indeed their most power was over the body, for here an audacious mouthing-randing-impudent-scullery-wastecoat-and-bodied rascal would have hail'd a penny from us for his scullership.'

Could Rabelais himself have described them better, or with vigour of humorous expression more heartily and enjoyably characteristic of his own all but incomparable genius?

The good old times, as remote in Shakespeare's day as in our own, were never more delightfully described than by Rowley in this noble and simple phrase: 'Then was England's whole year but a St. George's day.'

Webster wished that what he wrote might be read by the light of Shakespeare: an admirer of Rowley might hope and must wish that he should be read by the light of Lamb. His comedies have real as well as realistic merit: not equal to that of Dekker's or Middleton's at their best, but usually not far

inferior to Heywood's or to theirs. The first of them, *A New Wonder : A Woman Never Vext*, has received such immortal honour from the loving hand of Lamb that perhaps the one right thing to say of it would be an adaptation of a Catholic formula—‘Agnus locutus est : causa finita est.’ The realism is so thorough as to make the interest something more than historical : and historically it is so valuable as well as amusing that a reasonable student may overlook the offensive ‘mingle-mangle’ of prose and verse which cannot but painfully affect the nerves of all not congenitally insensitive readers, as it surely must have ground and grated on the ears of an audience accustomed to enjoy the prose as well as the verse of Shakespeare and his kind. No graver offence can be committed or conceived by a writer with any claim to any but contemptuous remembrance than this debasement of the currency of verse.

The character of Robert Foster is so noble and attractive in its selfless and manful simplicity that it gives us and leaves with us a more cordial sense of sympathetic regard and respect for his creator than we could feel if this gallant and homely figure were withdrawn from the stage of his invention. The female Polycrates who suffers under the curse of inevitable and intolerable good fortune is an admirable creature of broad comedy that never subsides or overflows or degenerates into farce.

A Match at Midnight is as notable for vivid impression of reality, but not so likely to leave a good taste—as Charlotte Brontë might have said—in the reader's mouth. Ancient Young, the hero, is a fine fellow ; but Messrs. Earlack and Carvegut are hardly amusing enough to reconcile us to toleration of such bad company. It is cleverly composed, and the

crosses and chances of the night are ingeniously and effectively invented and arranged : there is real and good broad humour in the parts of the usurer and his sons and the attractive but unwidowed Widow Wag. And I am not only free to admit but desirous to remark that a juster and more valuable judgment on such plays as these than any that I could undertake to deliver may very possibly be expected from readers whom they may more thoroughly arride—to use a favourite phrase of the all but impeccable critic, the all but infallible judge, whose praise has set the name of Rowley so high in the rank of realistic painters and historic naturalists for ever.

The copies of two dramatic nondescripts now happily preserved and duly treasured in the library of the British Museum bear inscribed in the same old hand, at the head of the first page and again on the last page under the last line, the same contemptuous three words—‘silly old story.’ And I fear it can hardly be maintained that either Chapman, when writing *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, or Rowley, when writing *A Shoemaker, a Gentleman*, was engaged in any very rational or felicitous employment of his wayward and unregulated powers. ‘The Printer’ of the play last named assures ‘the Reader’ of 1638, whom he assumes to be a member of the gentle craft, that ‘as plays were then, some twenty years agone, it was in the fashion.’ A singular fashion, the rare modern reader will probably reflect : especially when he remembers how far finer and how thoroughly charming a tribute of dramatic and poetic celebration had been paid full eighteen years earlier to the same favoured craft by the sweeter and rarer genius of Dekker. This quaintly apologetic assurance of bygone popularity in subject and in style will

remind all probable readers of Heywood's prologue to *The Royal King and Loyal Subject*, and his dedicatory address prefixed to *The Four Prentices of London*. It happily was not, however, in the printer's power to aver that such impudently immetrical verse as Rowley at once breaks ground with was ever in fashion with any of his famous fellows. Nothing can be worse than the headlong and slipshod stumble of Dekker's at its worst ; but his were the faults of hurry and impatience and shamefully scamped work : Rowley's, if I mistake not, is the far graver error of a preposterous theory that broken verse, rough and untunable as the shock of short chopping waves, is more dramatic and liker the natural speech of men and women than the rolling and flowing verse of Marlowe and of Shakespeare : which is as much liker life as it is nobler and more satisfying in workmanship. In reading bad verse the reader is constantly reminded that he is not reading good prose ; and this is not the effect produced by true realism—the impression left by actual intercourse or faithful presentation of it.

The hagiology of this eccentric play is more like Shirley's in *St. Patrick for Ireland* than Dekker's and Massinger's in *The Virgin Martyr*. Assuredly there is here nothing like the one incomparably lovely dialogue of Dorothea with her attendant angel. But there is the charm of a curious simplicity and sincerity in Rowley's straightforward and homely dramatic handling of the supernatural element : in the miracle of St. Winifred's well, and the conversion of Albon into St. Alban by 'that seminary knight,' as the tyrant Maximinus rather comically calls him, Amphiabel Prince of Wales. The courtship of the princely Offa, while disguised as the shoemaker's apprentice Cris-

pinus, by the Roman princess Laodice, daughter of Maximinus, is very lively and dramatic : the sprightliest scene, I should say, ever played out on the stage of Rowley's fancy. On the other hand, the martyrdom of St. Winifred and St. Hugh is an abject tragic failure : an abortive attempt at cheap terror and jingling pity, followed up by doggrel farce of intolerable grossness.

This play is a perfect repertory of slang and quaint phrases : as when the master shoemaker, who has for apprentices two persecuted princes in disguise, and is a very inferior imitation of Dekker's admirable Simon Eyre, calls his wife Lady d'Oliva—whatever that may mean, and when she inquires of one of the youngsters, 'What 's the matter, boy ? Why are so many chancery bills drawn in thy face ?' *Habent sua fata libelli* : it is inexplicable that this most curious play should never have been republished, when the volumes of Dodsley's *Old Plays* in their very latest reissue are encumbered with heaps of such leaden dullness and such bestial filth as no decent scavenger and no rational nightman would have dreamed of sweeping back into sight and smell of any possible reader.

But it is or it should be inconceivable and incredible that the masterpiece of Rowley's strong and singular genius, a play remarkable for its peculiar power or fusion of strange powers even in the sovereign age of Shakespeare, should have waited upwards of three hundred years and should still be waiting for the appearance of a second edition. The tragedy of *All's Lost by Lust*, published in the same year with Shakespeare's great posthumous torso of romantic tragedy, was evidently a favourite child of its author's : the terse and elaborate argument subjoined to the

careful and exhaustive list of characters may suffice to prove it. Among these characters we may note that one, 'a simple clownish Gentleman,' was 'personated by the poet': and having noted it, we cannot but long, with a fruitless longing, for such confidences as to the impersonation of the leading characters in other memorable plays of the period. There is some really good rough humour in the part of this honest clown and his fellows; but no duly appreciative reader will doubt that the author's heart was in the work devoted to the tragic and poetic scenes of a play which shows that the natural bent of his powers was towards tragedy rather than comedy. Alike as poet and as dramatist, he rises far higher and enjoys his work far more when the aim of his flight is towards the effects of imaginative terror and pity than when it is confined to the effects of humorous or pathetic realism. In the very first scene we breathe the air of tragic romance and imminent evil provoked by coalition rather than collision of the will of man with the doom of destiny; and the king's defiance of prophecy and tradition is so admirably rendered or suggested as a sign of brutal and egotistic rather than chivalrous or manful daring as to prepare the way with great dramatic and poetic skill for the subsequent scenes of attempted seduction and ultimate violation. With these the underplot, interesting and original in itself, well conceived and well carried through, is happily and naturally interwoven. The noble soliloquy of the invading and defeated Moorish king is by grace of Lamb familiar to all true lovers of the higher dramatic poetry of England. Nothing can be livelier and more natural than the scenes in which a recent bridegroom's heart is won from his loving and low-born wife by the offered hand and

the sprightly seductions of a light-hearted and high-born rival. But the crowning scene of the play and the crowning grace of the poem is the interview of father and daughter after the consummation of the crime which gave Spain into the hand of the Moor. The vivid dramatic life in every word is even more admirable than the great style, the high poetic spirit of the scene. I have always ventured to wonder that Lamb, whose admiration has made it twice immortal, did not select as a companion or a counterpart to it that other great camp scene from Webster's *Appius and Virginia* in which another outraged warrior and father stirs up his friends and fellow-soldiers to vindication of his honour and revenge for his wrong. It is surely even finer and more impressive than that selected in preference to it, which closes with the immolation of Virginia.

The scenes in which the tragic underplot of Rowley's tragedy is deftly and effectively wound up are full of living action and passion ; that especially in which the revenge of a deserted wife is wreaked mistakenly on the villainous minion to whose instigation she owes the infidelity of the husband for whom she mistakes him. The gross physical horrors which deform the close of a noble poem are relieved if not beautified by the great style of its age—an age unparalleled in wealth and variety of genius, a style unmatchable for its union of inspired and imaginative dignity with actual and vivid reality of impassioned and lofty life.

No comparison is possible, nor if possible could it be profitable, between the somewhat rough-hewn English oak of Rowley's play and the flawless Roman steel of Landor's great Miltonic tragedy on the same subject. The fervent praise of Southey was not too generous to be just in its estimate of that austere

THOMAS HEYWOOD

IF it is difficult to write at all on any subject once ennobled by the notice of Charles Lamb without some apprehensive sense of intrusion and presumption, least of all may we venture without fear of trespass upon ground so consecrated by his peculiar devotion as the spacious if homely province or demesne of the dramatist whose highest honour it is to have earned from the finest of all critics the crowning tribute of a sympathy which would have induced him to advise an intending editor or publisher of the dramatists of the Shakespearean age to begin by a reissue of the works of Heywood. The depth and width of his knowledge, the subtlety and the sureness of his intuition, place him so far ahead of any other critic or scholar who has ever done any stroke of work in any part of the same field that it may seem overbold for any such subordinate to express or to suggest a suspicion that this counsel would have been rather the expression of a personal and a partly accidental sympathy than the result of a critical and a purely rational consideration. And yet I can hardly think it questionable that it must have been less the poetic or essential merit than the casual or incidental associations of Heywood's work which excited so exceptional an enthusiasm in so excellent a judge. For as a matter of fact it must be admitted that in one instance at least the objections of the carper Hazlitt are better justified than the commendations of the finer and more appreciative critic. The

masterpiece ; it is lamentable to remember the injustice of its illustrious author to the men of Shakespeare's day. I fear he would certainly not have excepted the noble work of his precursor from his general condemnation or impeachment of 'their bloody bawdries'—a misjudgment gross enough for Hallam—or Voltaire when declining to the level of a Hallam. Landor was as headlong as these were hidebound, as fitful as they were futile ; but not even the dispraise or the disrelish of a finer if not of a greater dramatic poet could affect the credit or impair the station of one on whose merits the final sentence of appreciation has been irrevocably pronounced by the verdict of Charles Lamb.

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rancorous democrat who shared with Byron the infamy of sympathetic admiration for the enemy of England and the tyrant of France found for once an apt and a fair occasion to vent his spleen against the upper classes of his countrymen in criticism of the underplot of Heywood's most celebrated play. Lamb, thinking only of the Frankfords, Wincotts, and Geraldines whose beautiful and noble characters are the finest and surest witnesses to the noble and beautiful nature of their designer's, observes that 'Heywood's characters, his country gentlemen, etc., are exactly what we see (but of the best kind of what we see) in life.' But such country gentlemen as his Actons and Mountfords are surely of a worse than the worst kind ; more cruel or more irrational, more base or more perverse, than we need fear to see in life unless our experience should be exceptionally unfortunate. Lamb indeed is rather an advocate than a judge in the case of his fellow-Londoners Thomas Heywood and William Rowley ; but his pleading is better worth our attention than the summing up of a less cordial or less competent critic.

From critics or students who regard with an academic smile of cultivated contempt the love for their country or the faith in its greatness which distinguished such poor creatures as Virgil and Dante, Shakespeare and Milton, Coleridge and Wordsworth, no tolerance can be expected for the ingrained and inveterate provinciality of a poet whose devotion to his home-stead was not merely that of an Englishman but that of a Londoner, no less fond and proud of his city than of his country. The quaint, homely, single-hearted municipal loyalty of an old-world burgess, conscious of his station as 'a citizen of no mean city,' and proud even of the insults which provincials might

fling at him as a cockney or aristocrats as a tradesman, is so admirably and so simply expressed in the person of Heywood's first hero—the first in date, at all events, with whom a modern reader can hope to make acquaintance—that the nobly plebeian pride of the city poet is as unmistakably personal as the tenderness of the dramatic artist who has made the last night of the little princes in the Tower as terribly and pathetically real for the reader as Millais has made it for the spectator of the imminent tragedy. Why Shakespeare shrank from the presentation of it, and left to a humbler hand the tragic weight of a subject so charged with tenderness and terror, it might seem impertinent or impossible to conjecture—except to those who can perceive and appreciate the intense and sensitive love of children which may haply have made the task distasteful if not intolerable: but it is certain that even he could hardly have made the last words of the little fellows more touchingly and sweetly lifelike.

Were there nothing further to commend in the two parts of the historical play or chronicle history of *King Edward IV.*, this would suffice to show that the dramatic genius of Heywood was not unjustified of its early and perilous venture: but the hero of these two plays is no royal or noble personage, he is plain Matthew Shore the goldsmith. We find ourselves at once in what Coleridge would have called the anachronic atmosphere of Elizabethan London; our poet is a champion cockney, whose interest is really much less in the rise and fall of princes than in the homely loyalty of shopkeepers and the sturdy gallantry of their apprentices. The lively, easy, honest improvisation of the opening scenes has a certain value in its very crudity and simplicity: the homespun

rhetoric and the jogtrot jingle are signs at once of the date and of the class to which these plays must be referred. The parts of the rebels are rough-hewn rather than vigorous ; the comic or burlesque part of Josselin is very cheap and flimsy farce. The peculiar powers of Heywood in pathetic if not in humorous writing were still in abeyance or in embryo. Pathos there is of a true and manly kind in the leading part of Shore ; but it has little or nothing of the poignant and intense tenderness with which Heywood was afterwards to invest the similar part of Frankford. Humour there is of a genuine plainspun kind in the scenes which introduce the King as the guest of the tanner ; Hob and his surroundings, Grudgen and Goodfellow, are presented with a comic and cordial fidelity which the painter of Falstaff's ' villeggiatura,' the creator of Shallow, Silence, and Davy, might justly and conceivably have approved. It is rather in the more serious or ambitious parts that we find now and then a pre-Shakespearean immaturity of manner. The recurrent burden of a jingling couplet in the cajoleries of the procuress Mrs. Blague is a survival from the most primitive and conventional form of dramatic writing not yet thoroughly superseded and suppressed by the successive influences of Marlowe, of Shakespeare, and of Jonson ; while the treatment of character in such scenes as that between Clarence, Richard, and Dr. Shaw is crude and childish enough for a rival contemporary of Peele. The beautiful and simple part of Ayre, a character worthy to have been glorified by the mention and commendation of Heywood's most devoted and most illustrious admirer, is typical of the qualities which Lamb seems to have found most lovable in the representative characters of his favourite playwright.

In that prodigious monument of learning and labour, Mr. Fleay's *Biographical Chronicle of the English Drama*, the common attribution of these two plays to Heywood is impeached on the æsthetic score that 'they are far better than his other early work.' I have carefully endeavoured to do what justice might be done to their modest allowance of moderate merit; but whether they be Heywood's or—as Mr. Fleay, on apparent grounds of documentary evidence, would suggest—the work of Chettle and Day, I am certainly rather inclined to agree with the general verdict of previous criticism, which would hardly admit their equality and would decidedly question their claim to anything more than equality of merit with the least admirable or memorable of Heywood's other plays. Even the rough-hewn chronicle, *If you know not me you know nobody*, by which 'the troubles of Queen Elizabeth' before her accession are as nakedly and simply set forth in the first part as in the second are 'the building of the Royal Exchange' and 'the famous victory' over the Invincible Armada, has on the whole more life and spirit, more interest and movement, in action as in style. The class of play to which it belongs is historically the most curious if poetically the least precious of all the many kinds enumerated by Heywood in earnest or by Shakespeare in jest as popular or ambitious of popularity on the stage for which they wrote. Aristophanic license of libel or caricature, more or less ineffectually trammelled by the chance or the likelihood of prosecution and repression, is common under various forms to various ages and countries; but the serious introduction and presentation of contemporary figures and events give to such plays as these as mixed and peculiar a quality as

though the playwright's aim or ambition had been to unite in his humble and homespun fashion the two parts of an epic or patriotic historian and a political or social caricaturist ; a poet and a pamphleteer on the same page, a chronicler and a jester in the same breath. Of this Elizabethan chronicle the first part is the more literal and prosaic in its steady servility to actual record and registered fact : the bitterest enemy of poetic or dramatic fiction, from William Prynne to Thomas Carlyle, might well exempt from his else omnivorous appetite of censure so humble an example of such obsequious and unambitious fidelity. Of fiction or imagination there is indeed next to none. In Thomas Drue's play of *The Duchess of Suffolk*, formerly and plausibly misattributed to Heywood, part of the same ground is gone over in much the same fashion and to much the same effect ; but the subject, a single interlude of the Marian persecution, has more unity of interest than can be attained by any play running on the same line as Heywood's, from the opening to the close of the most hideous episode in our history. That the miserable life and reign of Mary Tudor should have been 'staged to the show' for the edification and confirmation of her half-sister's subjects in Protestant and patriotic fidelity of animosity towards Rome and Spain is less remarkable than that the same hopelessly improper topic for historical drama should in later days have been selected for dramatic treatment by English writers, and on one occasion by a great English poet. As there are within the range of any country's history, authentic or traditional, periods and characters in themselves so naturally fit and proper for transfiguration by poetry that the dramatist who should attempt to improve on the truth—the

actual or imaginary truth accepted as fact with regard to them—would probably if not certainly derogate from it, so are there others which cannot be transfigured without transformation. Such a character is the last and wretchedest victim of a religious reaction which blasted her kingdom with the hellfire of reviving devil-worship, and her name with the ineffaceable brand of an inseparable and damning epithet. If even the genius of Tennyson could not make the aspirations and the agonies of Mary as acceptable or endurable from the dramatic or poetic point of view as Marlowe and Shakespeare could make the sufferings of such poor wretches as their Edward the Second and Richard the Second, it is hardly to be expected that the humbler if more dramatic genius of Heywood should have triumphed over the desperate obstacle of a subject so drearily repulsive : but it is curious that both should have attempted to tackle the same hopeless task in the same fruitless fashion. The 'chronicle history' of Mary Tudor, had Shakespeare's self attempted it, could scarcely have been other—if we may judge by our human and fallible lights of the divine possibilities open to a superhuman and infallible intelligence—than a splendid and priceless failure from the dramatic or poetic point of view. The one chance open even to Shakespeare would have been to invent, to devise, to create ; not to modify, to adapt, to adjust. Bloody Mary has been transfigured into a tragic and poetic malefactress : but only by the most audacious and magnificent defiance of history and possibility. Madonna Lucrezia Estense Borgia (to use the proper ceremonial style adopted for the exquisitely tender and graceful dedication of the *Asolani*) died peaceably in the odour of incense offered at her shrine in the choicest Latin verse of

such accomplished poets and acolytes as Pietro Bembo and Ercole Strozzi. Nothing more tragic or dramatic could have been made of her peaceful and honourable end than of the reign of Mary Tudor as recorded in history. The greatest poet and dramatist of the nineteenth century has chosen to immortalize them by violence—to give them a life, or to give a life to their names, which history could not give. Neither he nor Shakespeare could have kept faith with the torpid fact and succeeded in the creation of a living and eternal truth. One thing may be registered to the credit, not indeed of the dramatist or the poet, but certainly of the man and the Englishman : the generous fair play shown to Philip II. in the scene which records his impartial justice done upon the Spanish assassin of an English victim. There is a characteristic manliness about Heywood's patriotism which gives a certain adventitious interest to his thinnest or homeliest work on any subject admitting or requiring the display of such a quality. In the second and superior part of this dramatic chronicle it informs the humbler comic parts with more life and spirit, though not with heartier devotion of goodwill, than the more ambitious and comparatively though modestly high-flown close of the play : which is indeed in the main rather a realistic comedy of city life, with forced and formal interludes of historical pageant or event, than a regular or even an irregular historical drama. Again the trusty cockney poet has made his hero and protagonist of a plain London tradesman : and has made of him at once a really noble and a heartily amusing figure. His better-born apprentice, a sort of Elizabethan Gil Blas or Gusman d'Alfarache, would be an excellent comic character if he had been a little more plausibly carried through to the close of his

versatile and venturous career ; as it is, the farce becomes rather impudently cheap ; though in the earlier passages of Parisian trickery and buffoonery there is a note of broad humour which may remind us of Molière—not of course the Molière of *Tartuffe*, but the Molière of M. de Pourceaugnac. The curious alterations made in later versions of the closing scene are sometimes though not generally for the better.

Lamb, in a passage which no reader can fail to remember, has declared that ‘ posterity is bound to take care’ (an obligation, I fear, of a kind which posterity is very far from careful to discharge) ‘ that a writer loses nothing by such a noble modesty ’ as that which induced Heywood to set as little store by his dramatic works as could have been desired in the rascally interest of those ‘ harlotry players ’ who thought it, forsooth, ‘ against their peculiar profit to have them come in print.’ But I am not sure that it was altogether a noble or at all a rational modesty which made him utter the avowal or the vaunt—‘ It never was any great ambition in me, to be in this kind voluminously read.’ For, eight years after this well-known passage was in print, when publishing a *Chronographicall History of all the Kings, and memorable passages of this Kingdome, from Brute to the Reigne of our Royall Soveraigne King Charles*, he offers, on arriving at the accession of Elizabeth, ‘ an apologie of the Author ’ for slurring or skipping the record of her life and times in a curious passage which curiously omits as unworthy of mention his dramatic work on the subject, while complacently enumerating his certainly less valuable and memorable other tributes to the great queen’s fame as follows :—‘ To write largely of her troubles, being a princesse, or of her rare and remarkable Reigne after

she was Queen, I should but feast you with dyet twice drest : Having my selfe published a discourse of the first : from her cradle to her crowne ; and in another bearing Title of the nine worthy Women : she being the last of the rest in time and place ; though equall to any of the former both in religious vertue, and all masculine magnanimity.' This surely looks but too much as though the dramatist and poet thought more of the chronicler and compiler than of the truer Heywood whose name is embalmed in the affection and admiration of his readers even to this day ; as though the author of *A Challenge for Beauty*, *The Fair Maid of the West*, and *A Woman killed with Kindness*, must have hoped and expected to be remembered rather as the author of *Troja Britannica*, 'Γυναικεῖον,' *The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels*, and even this *Life of Merlin*, surnamed *Ambrosius. His Prophesies, and Predictions Interpreted* ; and their truth made good by our English Annalls : undoubtedly, we may believe, 'a Subject never published in this kind before, and deserves' (sic) 'to be knowne and observed by all men.' Here follows the motto : 'Quotque aderant Vates, rebar adesse Deos.' The biographer and chronographer would apparently have been less flattered than surprised to hear that he would be remembered rather as the creator of Frankford, Mountferrers, and Geraldine, than as the chronicler of King Brute, Queen Elizabeth, and King James.

The singular series of plays which covers much the same ground as Caxton's immortal and delightful chronicle of the 'Histories' of Troy may of course have been partially inspired by that most enchanting 'recuyell' : but Heywood, as will appear on collation or confrontation of the dramatist with the his-

torian, must have found elsewhere the suggestion of some of his most effective episodes. The excellent simplicity and vivacity of style, the archaic abruptness of action and presentation, are equally noticeable throughout all the twenty-five acts which lead us from the opening of the Golden to the close of the Iron Age ; but there is a no less perceptible advance or increase of dramatic and poetic invention in the ten acts devoted to the tale of Troy and its sequel. Not that there is anywhere any want of good simple spirited work, homely and lively and appropriate to the ambitious humility of the design ; a design which aims at making popular and familiar to the citizens of Elizabethan London the whole cycle of heroic legend from the reign of Saturn to the death of Helen. Jupiter, the young hero of the first two plays and ages, is a really brilliant and amusing mixture of Amadis, Sigurd, and Don Juan : the pretty scene in which his infant life is spared and saved must be familiar, and pleasantly familiar, to all worthy lovers of Charles Lamb. The verse underlined and immortalised by his admiration—‘ For heaven’s sake, when you kill him, hurt him not ’—should suffice to preserve and to embalm the name of the writer. I can scarcely think that a later scene, apparently imitated from the most impudent idyl of Theocritus, can have been likely to elevate the moral tone of the young gentleman who must have taken the part of Callisto ; but the honest laureate of the city, stern and straightforward as he was in the enforcement of domestic duties and contemporary morals, could be now and then as audacious in his plebeian fashion as even Fletcher himself in his more patrician style of realism. There is spirit of a quiet and steady kind in the scenes of war and adventure that follow : Heywood, like

Caxton before him, makes of Saturn and the Titans very human and simple figures, whose doings and sufferings are presented with childlike straightforwardness in smooth and fluent verse and in dialogue which wants neither strength nor ease nor propriety. The subsequent episode of Danae is treated with such frank and charming fusion of realism and romance as could only have been achieved in the age of Shakespeare. To modern readers it may seem unfortunate for Heywood that a poet who never (to the deep and universal regret of all competent readers) followed up the dramatic promise of his youth, as displayed in the nobly vivid and pathetic little tragedy of *Sir Peter Harpdon's End*, should in our day have handled the story of Danae and the story of Bellerophon so effectively as to make it impossible for the elder poet either to escape or to sustain comparison with the author of *The Earthly Paradise*: but the most appreciative admirers of Morris will not be the slowest or the least ready to do justice to the admirable qualities displayed in Heywood's dramatic treatment of these legends. The naturally sweet and spontaneous delicacy of the later poet must not be looked for in the homely and audacious realism of Heywood; in whose work the style of the Knight's Tale and the style of the Miller's Tale run side by side and hand in hand.

From the Golden Age to the Iron Age the growth and ascent of Heywood's dramatic power may fairly be said to correspond in a reversed order with the degeneracy and decline of human heroism and happiness in the legendary gradation or degradation of the classical four ages. *The Golden Age* is a delightful example of dramatic poetry in its simplest and most primary stage; in *The Silver Age* the process

of evolution is already visible at work. Bellerophon and Aurea cannot certainly be compared with the Joseph and Phraxanor of Charles Wells : but the curt and abrupt scene in which they are hastily thrust on the stage and as hastily swept off it is excellently composed and written. The highest possible tribute to the simple and splendid genius of Plautus is paid by the evidence of the fact that all his imitators have been obliged to follow so closely on the lines of his supernatural, poetical, and farcical comedy of *Amphitryon*. Heywood Rotrou, Molière, and Dryden have sat at his feet and copied from his dictation like schoolboys. The French pupils, it must be admitted, have profited better and shown themselves apter and happier disciples than the English. I cannot think that even Molière has improved on the text of Rotrou as much, or nearly as much, as he has placed himself under unacknowledged obligation to his elder countryman : but in Dryden's version there is a taint of greasy vulgarity, a reek of obtrusive ruffianism, from which Heywood's version is as clean as Shakespeare's could have been, had he bestowed on the *Amphitruo* the honour he conferred on the *Menæchmi*. The power of condensation into a few compact scenes of material sufficient for five full acts is a remarkable and admirable gift of Heywood's.

After the really dramatic episode in which he had the advantage of guidance by the laughing light of a greater comic genius than his own, Heywood contentedly resumes the simple task of arranging for the stage a mythological chronicle of miscellaneous adventure. The jealousy of Juno is naturally the mainspring of the action and the motive which affords some show of connection or coherence to the three remaining acts of *The Silver Age* : the rape of

Proserpine, the mourning and wandering and wrath of Ceres, are treated with so sweet and beautiful a simplicity of touch that Milton may not impossibly have embalmed and transfigured some reminiscence of these scenes in a passage of such heavenly beauty as custom cannot stale. Another episode, and one not even indirectly connected with the labours of Hercules, is the story of Semele, handled with the same simple and straightforward skill of dramatic exposition, the same purity and fluency of blameless and spontaneous verse, that distinguish all parts alike of this dramatic chronicle. The second of the five plays composing it closes with the rescue of Proserpine by Hercules, and the judgment of Jupiter on 'the Arraignment of the Moon.'

In *The Brazen Age* there is somewhat more of dramatic unity or coherence than in the two bright easy-going desultory plays which preceded it : it closes at least with a more effective catastrophe than either of them in the death of Hercules. However far inferior to the haughty and daring protest or appeal in which Sophocles, speaking through the lips of the virtuous Hyllus, impeaches and denounces the iniquity of heaven with a steadfast and earnest vehemence unsurpassed in its outspoken rebellion by any modern questioner or blasphemer of divine providence, the simple and humble sincerity of the English playwright has given a not unimpressive or inharmonious conclusion to the same superhuman tragedy. In the previous presentation of the story of Meleager, Heywood has improved upon the brilliant and passionate rhetoric of Ovid by the introduction of an original and happy touch of dramatic effect : his Althaea, after firing the brand with which her son's life is destined to burn out, relents and plucks it back for

a minute from the flame, giving the victim a momentary respite from torture, a fugitive rerudescence of strength and spirit, before she rekindles it. The pathos of his farewell has not been overpraised by Lamb : who might have added a word in recognition of the very spirited and effective suicide of Althæa, not unworthily heralded or announced in such verses as these :

This was my son,
Born with sick throes, nursed from my tender breast,
Brought up with feminine care, cherished with love ;
His youth my pride ; his honour all my wishes ;
So dear, that little less he was than life.

The subsequent adventures of Hercules and the Argonauts are presented with the same quiet straightforwardness of treatment : it is curious that the tragic end of Jason and Medea should find no place in the multifarious chronicle which is nominally and mainly devoted to the record of the life and death of Hercules, but into which the serio-comic episode of Mars and Venus and Vulcan is thrust as crudely and abruptly as it is humorously and dramatically presented. The rivalry of Omphale and Deianeira for their hero's erratic affection affords a lively and happy mainspring—not suggested by Caxton—for the tragic action and passion of the closing scenes.

At the opening of *The Iron Age*, nineteen years later in date of publication, we find ourselves at last arrived in a province of dramatic poetry where something of consecutive and coherent action is apparently the aim if not always the achievement of the writer. These ten acts do really constitute something like a play, and a play of serious, various, progressive, and sustained interest, beginning with the elopement and closing with the suicide of Helen. There is little

in it to suggest the influence of either Homer or Shakespeare : whose *Troilus and Cressida* had appeared in print, for the helplessly bewildered admiration of an eternally mystified world, just twenty-three years before. The only figure equally prominent in either play is that of Thersites : but Heywood, happily and wisely, has made no manner of attempt to rival or to reproduce the frightful figure of the intelligent Yahoo in which the sane and benignant genius of Shakespeare has for once anticipated and eclipsed the mad and malignant genius of Swift. It should be needless to add that his Ulysses has as little of Shakespeare's as of Homer's : and that the brutalisation or degradation of the godlike figures of Ajax and Achilles is only less offensive in the lesser than in the greater poet's work. In the friendly duel between Hector and Ajax the very text of Shakespeare is followed with exceptional and almost servile fidelity : but the subsequent exchange of gifts is, of course, introduced in imitation of earlier and classic models. The contest of Ajax and Ulysses is neatly and spiritedly cast into dramatic form : Ovid, of course, remains unequalled, as he who runs may read in Dryden's grand translation, but Heywood has done better—to my mind at least—than Shirley was to do in the next generation ; though it is to be noted that Shirley has retained more of the magnificent original than did his immediate precursor : but the death of Ajax is too pitiful a burlesque to pass muster even as a blasphemous travesty of the sacred text of Sophocles. In the fifth play of this pentalogy Heywood has to cope with no such matchless models or precursors ; and it is perhaps the brightest and most interesting of the five. Sinon is a spirited and rather amusing understudy of Thersites : his seduction of Cressida

is a grotesquely diverting variation on the earlier legend relating to the final fall of the typical traitress ; and though time and space are wanting for the development or indeed the presentation of any more tragic or heroic character, the rapid action of the last two acts is workmanlike in its simple fashion : the complicated or rather accumulated chronicle of crime and retribution may claim at least the credit due to straightforward lucidity of composition and sprightly humility of style.

In *Love's Mistress, or The Queen's Masque*, the stage chronicler or historian of the Four Ages appears as something more of a dramatic poet : his work has more of form and maturity, with no whit less of spontaneity and spirit, simplicity and vivacity. The framework or setting of these five acts, in which Midas and Apuleius play the leading parts, is sustained with lively and homely humour from induction to epilogue : the story of Psyche is thrown into dramatic form with happier skill and more graceful simplicity by Heywood than afterwards by Molière and Corneille ; though there is here nothing comparable with the famous and exquisite love-scene in which the genius of Corneille renewed its youth and replumed its wing with feathers borrowed from the heedless and hapless Théophile's. The fortunes of Psyche in English poetry have been as curious and various as her adventures on earth and elsewhere. Besides and since this pretty little play of Heywood's, she has inspired a long narrative poem by Marmion, one of the most brilliant and independent of the younger comic writers who sat at the feet or gathered round the shrine of Ben Jonson ; a lyrical drama by William the Dutchman's poet laureate, than which nothing more portentous in platitude ever crawled

into print, and of which the fearfully and wonderfully wooden verse evoked from Shadwell's great predecessor in the office of court rhymester an immortalizing reference to 'Prince Nicander's vein'; a magnificent ode by Keats, and a very pretty example of metrical romance by Morris.

'Inexplicable and eccentric as were the moods and fashions of dramatic poetry in an age when Shakespeare could think fit to produce anything so singular in its composition and so mysterious in its motive as *Troilus and Cressida*, the most eccentric and inexplicable play of its time, or perhaps of any time, is probably *The Rape of Lucrece*.' This may naturally be the verdict of a hasty reader at a first glance over the parti-coloured scenes of a really noble tragedy, crossed and chequered with the broadest and quaintest interludes of lyric and erotic farce. But, setting these eccentricities duly or indulgently aside, we must recognise a fine specimen of chivalrous and romantic rather than classical or mythological drama; one, if not belonging properly or essentially to the third rather than to the second of the four sections into which Hewyood's existing plays may be exhaustively divided, which stands on the verge between them with something of the quaintest and most graceful attributes of either. The fine instinct and the simple skill with which the poet has tempered the villainy of his villains without toning down their atrocities by the alloy of any incongruous quality must be acknowledged as worthily characteristic of a writer who at his ethical best might be defined as something of a plebeian Sidney. There are touches of criminal heroism and redeeming humanity even in the parts of Sextus and Tullia: the fearless desperation of the doomed ravisher, the conjugal devotion

of the hunted parricide, give to the last defiant agony of the abominable mother and son a momentary tone of almost chivalrous dignity. The blank verse is excellent, though still considerably alloyed with rhyme : a fusion or alternation of metrical effects in which the young Heywood was no less skilful and successful, inartistic as the skill and illegitimate as the success may seem to modern criticism, than the young Shakespeare.

The eleven plays already considered make up the two divisions of Heywood's work which with all their great and real merit have least in them of those peculiar qualities most distinctive and representative of his genius : those qualities of which when we think of him we think first, and which on summing up his character as a poet we most naturally associate with his name. As a historical or mythological playwright, working on material derived from classic legends or from English annals, he shows signs now and then, as occasion offers, of the sweet-tempered manliness, the noble kindness, which won the heart of Lamb : something too there is in these plays of his pathos, and something of his humour : but if this were all we had of him we should know comparatively little of what we now most prize in him. Of this we find most in the plays dealing with English life in his own day : but there is more of it in his romantic tragicomedies than in his chronicle histories or his legendary complications and variations on the antique. The famous and delicious burlesque of Beaumont and Fletcher cannot often be forgotten but need not always be remembered in reading *The Four Prentices of London*. Externally the most extravagant and grotesque of dramatic poems, this eccentric tragicomedy of chivalrous adventure is full of poetic as

well as fantastic interest. There is really something of discrimination in the roughly and readily sketched characters of the four crusading brothers : the youngest especially is a lifelike model of restless and reckless gallantry as it appears when incarnate in a hot-headed English boy : unlike even in its likeness to the same type as embodied in a French youngster such as the immortal d'Artagnan. Justice has been done by Lamb, and consequently as well as subsequently by later criticism, to the occasionally fine poetry which breaks out by flashes in this Quixotic romance of the City, with its seriocomic ideal of crusading counter-jumpers : but it has never to my knowledge been observed that in the scene ' where they toss their pikes so,' which aroused the special enthusiasm of the worthy fellow-citizen whose own prentice was to bear the knightly ensign of the Burning Pestle, Heywood, the future object of Dryden's ignorant and pointless insult, anticipated with absolute exactitude the style of Dryden's own tragic blusterers when most busily bandying tennis-balls of ranting rhyme in mutual challenge and reciprocal retort of amœbæan epigram.¹

It is a pity that Heywood's civic or professional devotion to the service of the metropolis should ever have been worse employed than in the transfiguration of the idealised prentice : it is a greater pity that we cannot exchange all Heywood's extant masques for

¹ Compare this with any similar sample of heroic dialogue in *Tyrannic Love* or *The Conquest of Granada* :

'Rapier and pike, is that thy honoured play ?
Look down, ye gods, this combat to survey.'
'Rapier and pike this combat shall decide :
Gods, angels, men, shall see me tame thy pride.'
'I 'll teach thee : thou shalt like my zany be,
And feign to do my cunning after me.'

This will remind the reader not so much of the *Rehearsal* as of Butler's infinitely superior parody in the heroic dialogue of *Cat and Puss*.

any one of the two hundred plays or so now missing in which, as he tells us, he 'had either an entire hand, or at least a main finger.' The literary department of a Lord Mayor's show can hardly be considered as belonging to literature, even when a poet's time and trouble were misemployed in compiling the descriptive prose and the declamatory verse contributed to the ceremony. Not indeed that it was a poet who devoted so much toil and goodwill to celebration or elucidation of the laborious projects and objects both by water and land which then distinguished or deformed the sundry triumphs, pageants, and shows on which Messrs. Christmas Brothers and their most ingenious parent were employed in a more honourable capacity than the subordinate function of versifier or showman—an office combining the parts and the duties of the immortal Mrs. Jarley and her laureate Mr. Slum. Lexicographers might pick out of the text some rare if not unique Latinisms or barbarisms such as 'prestigion' and 'strage'; but except for the purpose of such 'harmless drudges' and perhaps of an occasional hunter after samples of the bathetic which might have rewarded the attention of Arbuthnot or Pope, the text of these pageants must be as barren and even to them it would presumably be as tedious a subject of study as the lucubrations of the very dullest English moralist or American humourist; a course of reading digestible only by such constitutions as could survive and assimilate a diet of Martin Tupper or Mark Twain. And yet even in the very homeliest doggrel of Heywood's or Shakespeare's time there is something comparatively not contemptible; the English, when not alloyed by fantastic or pedantic experiment, has a simple historic purity and dignity of its own; the

dullness is not so dreary as the dullness of mediæval prosers, the commonplace is not so vulgar as the commonplace of more modern scribes.

The Trial of Chivalry is a less extravagant example of homely romantic drama than *The Four Prentices of London*. We owe to Mr. Bullen the rediscovery of this play, and to Mr. Fleay the determination and verification of its authorship. In style and in spirit it is perfect Heywood : simple and noble in emotion and conception, primitive and straightforward in construction and expression ; inartistic but not ineffectual ; humble and facile, but not futile or prosaic. It is a rather more rational and natural piece of work than might have been expected from its author when equipped after the heroic fashion of Mallory or Froissart : its date is more or less indistinctly indicated by occasional rhymes and peculiar conventionalities of diction : and if Heywood in the panoply of a knight-errant may now and then suggest to his reader the figure of Sancho Panza in his master's armour, his pedestrian romance is so genuine, his modest ambition so high-spirited and high-minded, that it would be juster and more critical to compare him with Don Quixote masquerading in the accoutrements of his esquire. Dick Bowyer, whose life and death are mendaciously announced on the catchpenny title-page, and who (like Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*) does '*not die*,' is a rather rough, thin, and faint sketch of the bluff British soldier of fortune who appears and reappears to better advantage in other plays of Heywood and his fellows. That this must be classed among the earlier if not the earliest of his works we may infer from the primitive simplicity of a stage direction which recalls another in a play printed five years before. In the second scene of

the third act of *The Trial of Chivalry* we read as follows :—‘Enter Forester, missing the other taken away, speaks anything, and exit.’ In the penultimate scene of the second part of *King Edward IV.* we find this even quainter direction, which has been quoted before now as an instance of the stage conditions or habits of the time :—‘Jockie is led to whipping over, the stage, speaking some words, but of no importance.’

A further and deeper debt of thanks is due to Mr. Bullen for the recovery of *The Captives, or The Lost Recovered*, after the lapse of nearly three centuries. The singularly prophetic sub-title of this classic and romantic tragicomedy has been justified at so late a date by the beneficence of chance, in favourable conjunction with the happy devotion and fortunate research of a thorough and a thoroughly able student, as to awaken in all fellow-lovers of dramatic poetry a sense of hopeful wonder with regard to the almost illimitable possibilities of yet further and yet greater treasure to be discovered and recovered from the keeping of ‘dust and damned oblivion.’ Meantime we may be heartily thankful for the recovery of an excellent piece of work, written throughout with the easy mastery of serious or humorous verse, the graceful pliancy of style and the skilful simplicity of composition, which might have been expected from a mature work of Heywood’s, though the execution of it would now and then have suggested an earlier date. The clown, it may be noticed, is the same who always reappears to do the necessary comicalities in Heywood’s plays; if hardly ‘a fellow of infinite jest,’ yet an amusing one in his homely way; though one would have thought that on the homeliest London stage of 1624 the taste for antiphonal improvisation of doggrel must have passed

into the limbo of obsolete simplicities. The main plot is very well managed, as with Plautus once more for a model might properly have been expected ; the rather ferociously farcical underplot must surely have been borrowed from some *fabliau*. The story has been done into doggrel by George Colman the younger : but that cleanly and pure-minded censor of the press would hardly have licensed for the stage a play which would have required, if the stage-carpenter had been then in existence, the production of a scene which would have anticipated what Gautier so plausibly plumed himself upon as a novelty in stage effect—imagined for the closing scene of his imaginary tragedy of *Heliogabalus*.

There are touches of pathetic interest and romantic invention in *A Maidenhead well Lost*: two or three of the leading characters are prettily sketched if not carefully finished, and the style is a graceful compromise between unambitious poetry and mildly spirited prose : but it is hardly to be classed among Heywood's best work of the kind : it has no scenes of such fervid and noble interest, such vivid and keen emotion, as distinguish *A Challenge for Beauty* : and for all its simple grace of writing and ingenuous ingenuity of plot it may not improbably be best remembered by the average modern reader as remarkable for the most amusing and astonishing example on record of anything but 'inexplicable' dumb show—to be paralleled only and hardly by a similar interlude of no less elaborate arrangement and significant eccentricity in the sole dramatic venture of Henri de Latouche—*La Reigne d'Espagne*.

Little favour has been shown by modern critics and even by modern editors to *The Royal King and the Loyal Subject* : and the author himself, in

committing it to the tardy test of publication, offered a quaint and frank apology for its old-fashioned if not obsolete style of composition and versification. Yet I cannot but think that Hallam was right and Dyce was wrong in his estimate of a play which does not challenge and need not shrink from comparison with Fletcher's more elaborate, rhetorical, elegant and pretentious tragicomedy of *The Loyal Subject*; that the somewhat eccentric devotion of Heywood's hero is not more slavish or foolish than the obsequious submission of Fletcher's; and that even if we may not be allowed to make allowance for the primitive straightforwardness or take delight in the masculine simplicity of the elder poet, we must claim leave to object that there is more essential servility of spirit, more preposterous prostration of manhood, in the Russian ideal of Fletcher than in the English ideal of Heywood. The humour is as simple as is the appeal to emotion or sympathetic interest in this primitive tragicomedy; but the comic satire on worldly venality and versatility is as genuine and honest as the serious exposition of character is straightforward and sincere.

The best of Heywood's romantic plays is the most graceful and beautiful, in detached scenes and passages, of all his extant works. The combination of the two plots—they can hardly be described as plot and underplot—is so dexterously happy that it would do the highest credit to a more famous and ambitious artist: the rival heroes are so really noble and attractive that we are agreeably compelled to condone whatever seems extravagant or preposterous in their relations or their conduct: there is a breath of Quixotism in the air which justifies and ennobles it. The heroines are sketched with natural

grace and spirit : it is the more to be regretted that their bearing in the last act should have less of delicacy or modesty than of ingenious audacity in contrivances for striking and daring stage effect ; a fault as grave in æsthetics as in ethics, and one rather to have been expected from Fletcher than from Heywood. But the general grace and the occasional pathos of the writing may fairly be set against the gravest fault that can justly be found with so characteristic and so charming a work of Heywood's genius at its happiest and brightest as *A Challenge for Beauty*.

The line of demarcation between realism and romance is sometimes as difficult to determine in the work of Heywood as in the character of his time : the genius of England, the spirit of Englishmen, in the age of Shakespeare, had so much of the practical in its romance and so much of the romantic in its practice that the beautiful dramatic poem in which the English heroes Manhurst and Montferrers play their parts so nobly beside their noble Spanish peers in chivalry ought perhaps to have been classed rather among the studies of contemporary life on which their author's fame must principally and finally depend than among those which have been defined as belonging to the romantic division of his work. There is much the same fusion of interests, as there is much the same mixture of styles, in the conduct of a play for which we have once more to tender our thanks to the living benefactor at once of Heywood and of his admirers. That Mr. Bullen was well advised in putting forward a claim for Heywood as the recognisable author of a play which a few years ago had never seen the light is as evident as that his estimate of the fine English quality which induced this recognition was justified by all rules of moral

evidence. There can be less than little doubt that *Dick of Devonshire* is one of the two hundred and twenty in which Heywood had 'a main finger'—though not, I should say, by any means 'an entire hand.' The metre is not always up to his homely but decent mark: though in many of the scenes it is worthy of his best plays for smoothness, fluency, and happy simplicity of effect. Dick Pike is a better study of the bluff and tough English hero than Dick Bowyer in *The Trial of Chivalry*: and the same chivalrous sympathy with the chivalrous spirit and tradition of a foreign and a hostile nation which delights us in *A Challenge for Beauty* pervades and vivifies this long-lost and long-forgotten play. The partial sacrifice of ethical propriety or moral consistency to the actual or conventional exigences of the stage is rather more startling than usual: a fratricidal ravisher and slanderer could hardly have expected even from theatrical tolerance the monstrous lenity of pardon and dismissal with a prospect of being happy though married. The hand of Heywood is more recognisable in the presentation of a clown who may fairly be called identical with all his others, and in the noble answer of the criminal's brother to their father's very natural question, 'Why dost thou take his part so ?'

Because no drop of honour falls from him
But I bleed with it.

This high-souled simplicity of instinct is as traceable in the earlier as in the later of Heywood's extant works: he is English of the English in his quiet, frank, spontaneous expression, when suppression is no longer either possible or proper, of all noble and gentle and natural emotion. His passion and his

pathos, his loyalty and his chivalry, are always so unobtrusive that their modesty may sometimes run the risk of eclipse before the glory of more splendid poets and more conspicuous patriots ; but they are true and trustworthy as Shakespeare's or Milton's or Wordsworth's or Tennyson's or Browning's.

It was many a year before Dick Pike had earned the honour of commemoration by his hand or by any other poet's that Heywood had won his spurs as the champion presenter—if I may be allowed to revive the word—of his humbler and homelier countrymen under the light of a no less noble than simple realism. *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* is a notable example of what I believe is professionally or theatrically called a one-part piece. Adapting Dr. Johnson's curiously unjust and inept remark on Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII.*—the play in which, according to the principles or tenets of the new criticism which walks or staggers by the new light of a new scholarship, 'the new Shakspere' may or must have been assisted by Fletcher (why not also by Meddleton, Messenger, and a few other *novi homines*?), we may say, and it may be said this time with some show of reason, that the genius of the author limps in and limps out with the Cripple. Most of the other characters and various episodical incidents of the composite story are alike, if I may revive a good and expressive phrase of the period, hastily and unskillfully slubbered up : Bowdler is a poor secondhand and thirdrate example of the Jonsonian gull ; and the transfer of Moll's regard from him to his friend is both childishly conceived and childishly contrived. On the whole, a secondrate play, with one or two firstrate scenes and passages to which Lamb has done perhaps no more than justice by the characteristic

and eloquent cordiality of his commendations. Its date may be probably determined as early among the earliest of its author's by the occurrence in mid dialogue of a sestet in the popular metre of *Venus and Adonis*, with archaic inequality in the lengths of the second and fourth rhyming words: a notable note of metrical or immetrical antiquity in style. The self-willed if high-minded Phyllis Flower has something in her of Heywood's later heroines, Bess Bridges of Plymouth and Luce the goldsmith's daughter, but is hardly as interesting or attractive as either.

Much less than this can be said for the heroines, if heroines they can in any sense be called, of the two plays by which Heywood is best known as a tragic and a comic painter of contemporary life among his countrymen. It is certainly not owing to any exceptional power of painting or happiness in handling feminine character that the first place among his surviving works has been generally and rationally assigned to *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. The fame of this famous realistic tragedy is due to the perfect fitness of the main subject for treatment in the manner of which Heywood was in his day and remains to the present day beyond all comparison the greatest and the most admirable master. It is not that the interest is either naturally greater, or greater by force and felicity of genius in the dramatist, than that of other and far inferior plays. It is not that the action is more artistically managed: it is not that curiosity or sympathy is aroused or sustained with any particular skill. Such a play as *Fatal Curiosity* is as truthfully lifelike and more tragically exciting: it is in mere moral power and charm, with just a touch of truer and purer poetry

pervading and colouring and flavouring and quickening the whole, that the work of a Heywood approves itself as beyond the reach or the ambition of a Lillo. One figure among many remains impressed on his reader's memory once for all : the play is full of incident, perhaps over full of actors, excellently well written and passably well composed ; but it lives, it survives and overtops its fellows, by grace of the character of its hero. The underplot, whether aesthetically or historically considered, is not more singular and sensational than extravagant and unpleasant to natural taste as well as to social instinct : the other agents in the main plot are little more than sketches—sometimes deplorably out of drawing : Anne is never really alive till on her deathbed, and her paramour is never alive—in his temptation, his transgression, or his impenitence—at all. The whole play, as far as we remember or care to remember it, is Frankford : he suffices to make it a noble poem and a memorable play.

The hero of *The English Traveller*, however worthy to stand beside him as a typical sample of English manhood at its noblest and gentlest, cannot be said to occupy so predominant a place in the conduct of the action or the memory of the reader. The comic Plautine underplot—Plautus always brought good luck to Heywood—is so incomparably preferable to the ugly and unnatural though striking and original underplot of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* as well-nigh to counterbalance the comparative lack of interest, plausibility, and propriety in the main action. The seduction of Mrs. Frankford is so roughly slurred over that it is hard to see how, if she could not resist a first whisper of temptation, she can ever have been the loyal wife and mother whose fall we are expected

to deplore : but the seduction of Mrs. Wincott, or rather her transformation from the likeness of a loyal and high-minded lady to the likeness of an impudent and hypocritical harlot, is neither explained nor explicable in the case of a woman who dies of a sudden shock of shame and penitence. Her paramour is only not quite so shapeless and shadowy a scoundrel as the betrayer of Frankford : but Heywood is no great hand at a villain : his nobly simple conception and grasp and development of character will here be recognised only in the quiet and perfect portraiture of the two grand old gentlemen and the gallant unselfish youth whom no more subtle or elaborate draughtsman could have set before us in clearer or fuller outline, with more attractive and actual charm of feature and expression.

The Fair Maid of the West is one of Heywood's most characteristic works, and one of his most delightful plays. Inartistic as this sort of dramatic poem may seem to the lovers of theatrical composition and sensational arrangement, of emotional calculations and premeditated shocks, it has a place of its own, and a place of honour, among the incomparably various forms of noble and serious drama which English poets of the Shakespearean age conceived, created, and left as models impossible to reproduce or to rival in any generation of poets or readers, actors or spectators, after the decadent forces of English genius in its own most natural and representative form of popular and creative activity had finally shrivelled up and shuddered into everlasting inanition under the withering blast of Puritanism. Before that blight had fallen upon the country of Shakespeare, the variety and fertility of dramatic form and dramatic energy which distinguished the typical imagination

or invention of his countrymen can only be appreciated or conceived by students of what yet is left us of the treasure bequeathed by the fellows and the followers of Shakespeare. Every other man who could speak or write at all was a lyric poet, a singer of beautiful songs, in the generation before Shakespeare's: every other such man in Shakespeare's was a dramatic poet above or beyond all comparison with any later claimant of the title among Shakespeare's countrymen. One peculiarly and characteristically English type of drama which then flourished here and there among more ambitious if not more interesting forms or varieties, and faded for ever with the close of the age of Shakespeare, was the curious and delightful kind of play dealing with records or fictions of contemporary adventure. The veriest failures in this line have surely something of national and historical interest; telling us as they do of the achievements or in any case of the aspirations and the ideals, the familiar traditions and ambitions and admirations, of our simplest and noblest forefathers. Even such a play as that in which the adventures of the Shirleys were hurried and huddled into inadequate and incoherent presentation as *The Travels of Three English Brothers*, however justly it may offend or dissatisfy the literary critic, can hardly be without attraction for the lover of his country: curiosity may be disappointed of its hope, yet patriotism may find matter for its sympathy. And if so much may be said on behalf of a poetic and dramatic failure, this and far more than this may be claimed on behalf of such plays as *The Fair Maid of the West* and *Fortune by Land and Sea*. Of these the first is certainly the better play: I should myself be inclined to rank it among Heywood's very best. He never wrote

anything brighter, sprightlier, livelier or fuller of life and energy : more amusing in episodical incident or byplay, more interesting and attractive in the structure or the progress of the main story. No modern heroine with so strong a dash of the Amazon —so decided a cross of the male in her—was ever so noble, credible and lovable as Bess Bridges : and Plymouth ought really to do itself the honour of erecting a memorial to her poet. An amusing instance of Heywood's incomparable goodnature and sweetness of temper in dealing with the creatures of his genius—incomparable I call it, because in Shakespeare the same beautiful quality is more duly tempered and toned down to more rational compliance with the demands of reason and probability, whether natural or dramatic—is here to be recognised in the redemption of a cowardly bully, and his conversion from a lying ruffian into a loyal and worthy sort of fellow. The same gallant spirit of sympathy with all noble homeliness of character, whether displayed in joyful search of adventure or in manful endurance of suffering and wrong, informs the less excellently harmonious and well-built play which bears the truly and happily English title of *Fortune by Land and Sea*. It has less romantic interest than the later adventures of the valiant Bess and her Spencer with the amorous king of Fez and his equally erratic consort ; not to mention the no less susceptible Italians among whom their lot is subsequently cast : but it is a model of natural and noble simplicity, of homely and lively variety. There is perhaps more of the roughness and crudity of style and treatment which might be expected from Rowley than of the humaner and easier touch of Heywood in the conduct of the action : the curious vehemence and primitive

brutality of social or domestic tyranny may recall the use of the same dramatic motives by George Wilkins in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*: but the mixture or fusion of tender and sustained emotion with the national passion for enterprise and adventure is pleasantly and peculiarly characteristic of Heywood.

In *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* the dramatic ability of Heywood, as distinct from his more poetic and pathetic faculty, shows itself at its best and brightest. There are not many much better examples of the sort of play usually defined as a comedy of intrigue, but more properly definable as a comedy of action. The special risk to which a purveyor of this kind of ware must naturally be exposed is the tempting danger of sacrificing propriety and consistency of character to effective and impressive suggestions or developments of situation or event; the inclination to think more of what is to happen than of the persons it must happen to—the characters to be actively or passively affected by the concurrence or the evolution of circumstances. Only to the very greatest of narrative or dramatic artists in creation and composition can this perilous possibility be all but utterly unknown. Poets of the city no less than poets of the court, the homely Heywood as well as the fashionable Fletcher, tripped and fell now and then over this awkward stone of stumbling—a very rock of offence to readers of a more exacting temper or a more fastidious generation than the respective audiences of patrician and plebeian London in the age of Shakespeare. The leading young man of this comedy now under notice is represented as 'a wild-headed gentleman,' and revealed as an abject ruffian of unredeemed and irredeemable rascality. As much and even more may be said of the execrable wretch who

fills a similar part in an admirably written play published thirty-six years earlier and verified for the first time as Heywood's by the keen research and indefatigable intuition of Mr. Fleay. The parallel passages cited by him from the broadly farcical underplots are more than suggestive, even if they be not proof positive, of identity in authorship : but the identity in atrocity of the two hideous figures who play the two leading parts must reluctantly be admitted as more serious evidence. The abuse of innocent foreign words or syllables by comparison or confusion with indecent native ones is a simple and schoolboylike sort of jest for which Master Heywood, if impeached as even more deserving of the birch than any boy on his stage, might have pleaded the example of the captain of the school, and protested that his humble audacities, if no less indecorous, were funnier and less forced than Master Shakespeare's. As for the other member of Webster's famous triad, I fear that the most indulgent sentence passed on Master Dekker, if sent up for punishment on the charge of bad language and impudence, could hardly in justice be less than Orbilian or Draconic. But he was apparently if not assuredly almost as incapable as Shakespeare of presenting the most infamous of murderers as an erring but pardonable transgressor, not unfit to be received back with open arms by the wife he has attempted, after a series of the most hideous and dastardly outrages, to dispatch by poison. The excuse for Heywood is simply that in his day as in Chaucer's the orthodox ideal of a married heroine was still none other than Patient Grizel : Shakespeare alone had got beyond it.

The earlier of these two plays, 'a pleasant' if somewhat sensational 'comedy entitled *How to Choose*

a Good Wife from a Bad,' is written for the most part in Heywood's most graceful and poetical vein of verse, with beautiful simplicity, purity, and fluency of natural and musical style. In none of his plays is the mixture or rather the fusion of realism with romance more simply happy and harmonious : the rescue of the injured wife by a faithful lover from the tomb in which, like Juliet, she has been laid while under the soporific influence of a supposed poison could hardly have been better or more beautifully treated by any but the very greatest among Heywood's fellow-poets. There is no merit of this kind in the later play : but from the dramatic if not even from the ethical point of view it is, on the whole, a riper and more rational sort of work. The culmination of accumulating evidence by which the rascal hero is ultimately overwhelmed and put to shame, driven from lie to lie and reduced from retractation to retractation as witness after witness starts up against him from every successive corner of the witch's dwelling, is as masterly in management of stage effect as any contrivance of the kind in any later and more famous comedy : nor can I remember a more spirited and vivid opening to any play than the quarrelling scene among the gamblers with which this one breaks out at once into lifelike action, full of present interest and promise of more to come. The second scene, in which the fair sempstress appears at work in her father's shop, recalls and indeed repeats the introduction of the heroine in an earlier play : but here again the author's touch is firmer and his simplicity more masculine than before. This coincidence is at least as significant as that between the two samples of flogging-block doggrel collated for comparison by Mr. Fleay : it is indeed a suggestive though super-

fluous confirmation of Heywood's strangely questioned but surely unquestionable claim to the authorship of *The Fair Maid of the Exchange*. A curious allusion to a more famous play of the author's is the characteristic remark of the young ruffian Chartley, ' Well, I see you choleric hasty men are the kindest when all is done. Here's such wetting of handkerchers ! he weeps to think of his wife, she weeps to see her father cry ! Peace, fool, we shall else have thee claim kindred of the woman killed with kindness.' And in the fourth and last scene of the fourth act the same scoundrel is permitted to talk Shakespeare — ' I'll go, although the devil and mischance look big.'

Poetical justice may cry out against the dramatic lenity which could tolerate or prescribe for the sake of a comfortable close to this comedy the triumphant escape of a villainous old impostor and baby-farmer from the condign punishment due to her misdeeds ; but the severest of criminal judges if not of professional witch-finders might be satisfied with the justice, or injustice done upon ' the late Lancashire Witches ' in the bright and vigorous tragicomedy which, as we learn from Mr. Fleay, so unwarrantably and uncharitably (despite a disclaimer in the epilogue) anticipated the verdict of their judges against the defenceless victims of terrified prepossession and murderous perjury. But at this time of day the mere poetical reader or dramatic student need not concern himself, while reading a brilliant and delightful play, with the soundness or unsoundness of its moral and historical foundations. There may have been a boy so really and so utterly possessed by the devil who seems now and then to enter into young creatures of human form and be-monster

them as to amuse himself by denouncing helpless and harmless women to the most horrible of deaths on the most horrible of charges : that hideous passing fact does not affect or impair the charming and lasting truth of Heywood's unsurpassable study, the very model of a gallant and lifelike English lad, all compact of fearlessness and fun, audacity and loyalty, so perfectly realised and rendered in this quaint and fascinating play. The admixture of what a modern boy would call cheek and chaff with the equally steadfast and venturesome resolution of the indomitable young scapegrace is so natural as to make the supernatural escapades in which it involves him quite plausible for the time to a reader of the right sort : even as (to compare this small masterpiece with a great one) such a reader, while studying the marvellous text of Meinholt, is no more sceptical than is their chronicler as to the sorceries of Sidonia von Bork. And however condemnable or blameworthy the authors of *The Witches of Lancashire* may appear to a modern reader or a modern magistrate or jurist for their dramatic assumption or presumption in begging the question against the unconvicted defendants whom they describe in the prologue as ' those witches the fat jailor brought to town,' they can hardly have been either wishful or able to influence the course of justice towards criminals of whose evident guilt they were evidently convinced. Shadwell's later play of the same name, though not wanting in such rough realistic humour and coarse-grained homespun interest as we expect in the comic produce of his hard and heavy hand, makes happily no attempt to emulate the really noble touches of poetry and pathos with which Heywood has thrown out into relief the more serious aspect of the supposed crime of witchcraft in its influence or refraction upon

the honour and happiness of innocent persons. Og was naturally more in his place and more in his element as the second 'fat jailor' of Lancashire witches than as the second English dramatic poet of Psyche : he has come closer than his precursors, closer indeed than could have been thought possible, to actual presentation of the most bestial and abominable details of demonolatry recorded by the chroniclers of witchcraft : and in such scenes as are rather transcribed than adapted from such narratives he has imitated his professed master and model, Ben Jonson, by appending to his text, with the most minute and meticulous care, all requisite or more than requisite references to his original authorities. The allied poets who had preceded him were content to handle the matter more easily and lightly, with a quaint apology for having nothing of more interest to offer than 'an argument so thin, persons so low,' that they could only hope their play might 'pass pardoned, though not praised.' Brome's original vein of broad humour and farcical fancy is recognisable enough in the presentation of the bewitched household where the children rule their parents and are ruled by their servants ; a situation which may have suggested the still more amusing development of the same fantastic motive in his admirable comedy of *The Antipodes*. There is a noticeable reference to *Macbeth* in the objurgations lavished by the daughter upon the mother under the influence of a revolutionary spell : 'Is this a fit habit for a handsome young gentlewoman's mother ? as I hope to be a lady, you look like one o' the Scottish wayward sisters.' The still more broadly comic interlude of the bewitched rustic bridegroom and his loudly reclamatory bride is no less humorously sustained and carried through.

Altogether, for an avowedly hasty and occasional piece of work, this tragicomedy is very creditably characteristic of both its associated authors.

How small a fraction of Heywood's actual work is comprised in these twenty-six plays we cannot even conjecturally compute ; we only know that they amount to less than an eighth part of the plays written wholly or mainly by his indefatigable hand, and that they are altogether outweighed in volume, though decidedly not in value, by the existing mass of his undramatic work. We know also, if we have eyes to see, that the very hastiest and slightest of them does credit to the author, and that the best of them are to be counted among the genuine and imperishable treasures of English literature. Such amazing fecundity and such astonishing industry would be memorable even in a far inferior writer ; but, though I certainly cannot pretend to anything like an exhaustive or even an adequate acquaintance with all or any of his folios, I can at least affirm that they contain enough delightfully readable matter to establish a more than creditable reputation. His prose, if never to be called masterly, may generally be called good and pure : its occasional pedantries and pretensions are rather signs of the century than faults of the author : and he can tell a story, especially a short story, as well as if not better than many a better-known writer. I fear, however, that it is not the poetical quality of his undramatic verse which can ever be said to make it worth reading : it is, as far as I know, of the very homeliest homespun ever turned out by the very humblest of workmen. His poetry, it would be pretty safe to wager, must be looked for exclusively in his plays : but there, if not remarkable for depth or height of imagination or of

passion, it will be found memorable for unsurpassed excellence of unpretentious elevation in treatment of character. The unity (or, to borrow from Coleridge a barbaric word, the triunity) of noble and gentle and simple in the finest quality of the English character at its best—of the English character as revealed in our Sidneys and Nelsons and Collingwoods and Franklins—is almost as apparent in the best scenes of his best plays as in the lives of our chosen and best-beloved heroes: and this, I venture to believe, would have been rightly regarded by Thomas Heywood as a more desirable and valuable success than the achievement of a noisier triumph, or the attainment of a more conspicuous place among the poets of his country.

CYRIL TOURNEUR

'THEY, shut up under their roofs, the prisoners of darkness, and fettered with the bonds of a long night, lay exiled, fugitives from the eternal providence. For while they supposed to lie hid in their secret sins, they were scattered under a dark veil of forgetfulness, being horribly astonished, and troubled with sights. . . . Sad visions appeared unto them with heavy countenances. No power of the fire might give them light : neither could the bright flames of the stars endure to lighten that horrible night. Only there appeared unto them a fire kindled of itself, very dreadful : for being much terrified, they thought the things which they saw to be worse than the sight they saw not. . . . The whole world shined with clear light, and none were hindered in their labour : over them only was spread an heavy night, an image of that darkness which should afterwards receive them : but yet were they unto themselves more grievous than the darkness.' In this wild world of fantastic retribution and prophetic terror the genius of a great English poet—if greatness may be attributed to a genius which holds absolute command in a strictly limited province of reflection and emotion—was born and lived and moved and had its being. The double mainspring of its energy is not difficult to define : its component parts are simply adoration of good and abhorrence of evil : all other sources of emotion were subordinate to these : love, hate, resentment, resignation, self-devotion, are but transitory

agents on this lurid and stormy stage, which pass away and leave only the sombre fire of meditative indignation still burning among the ruins of shattered hopes and lives. More splendid success in pure dramatic dialogue has not been achieved by Shakespeare or by Webster than by Cyril Tourneur in his moments of happiest invention or purest inspiration : but the intensity of his moral passion has broken the outline and marred the symmetry of his general design. And yet he was at all points a poet : there is an accent of indomitable self-reliance, a note of persistence and resistance more deep than any note of triumph, in the very cry of his passionate and implacable dejection, which marks him as different in kind from the race of the great prosaic pessimists whose scorn and hatred of mankind found expression in the contemptuous and rancorous despondency of Swift or of Carlyle. The obsession of evil, the sensible prevalence of wickedness and falsehood, self-interest and stupidity, pressed heavily on his fierce and indignant imagination ; yet not so heavily that mankind came to seem to him the ' damned race,' the hopeless horde of millions ' mostly fools ' too foolish or too foul to be worth redemption, which excited the laughing contempt of Frederic the Great and the raging contempt of his biographer. On this point the editor to whom all lovers of high poetry were in some measure indebted for the first collection and reissue of his works has done much less than justice to the poet on whose text he can scarcely be said to have expended an adequate or even a tolerable amount of pains. A reader of his introduction who had never studied the text of his author might be forgiven if he should carry away the impression that Tourneur, as a serious or tragic poet,

was little more than a better sort of Byron ; a quack less impudent but not less transparent than the less inspired and more inflated ventriloquist of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* : whereas it is hardly too much to say that the earnest and fiery intensity of Tourneur's moral rhetoric is no less unmistakable than the blatant and flatulent ineptitude of Byron's.

It seems to me that Tourneur might say with the greatest of the Popes, 'I have loved justice, and hated iniquity : therefore I die in exile' ; therefore, in other words, I am cast aside and left behind by readers who are too lazy, too soft and slow of spirit, too sleepily sensual and self-sufficient, to endure the fiery and purgatorial atmosphere of my work. But there are breaths from heaven as surely as there are blasts from hell in the tumultuous and electric air of it. The cynicism and egotism which the editor already mentioned has the confidence to attribute to him are rather the outer garments than the inner qualities of his genius : the few and simple lines in which his purer and nobler characters are rapidly but not roughly drawn suffice to give them all due relief and all requisite attraction. The virtuous victims of the murderous conspirator whose crimes and punishment are the groundwork of *The Atheist's Tragedy* have life and spirit enough to make them heartily interesting : and the mixed character of Sebastian, the high-hearted and gallant young libertine whose fearless frankness of generosity brushes aside and breaks away the best-laid schemes of his father, is as vividly and gracefully drawn as any of the same kind on the comic or the tragic stage.

In this earlier of the two plays extant which preserve the name of Cyril Tourneur the magnificent if grotesque extravagance of the design may perhaps be partly accounted for by the didactic or devotional

aim of the designer. A more appalling scarecrow or scarebabe, as the contemporaries of his creator would have phrased it, was certainly never begotten by orthodoxy on horror than the figure of the portentous and prodigious criminal who here represents the practical results of indulgence in free thought. It is a fine proof of the author's naturally dramatic genius that this terrific successor of Vanini and precursor of Diderot should be other than a mere man of straw. Huge as is the wilful and deliberate exaggeration of his atrocity, there are scenes and passages in which his daring and indomitable craft is drawn with native skill as well as force of hand ; in which it is no mere stage monster, but a genuine man, plausible and relentless, versatile and fearless, who comes before us now clothed in all the cajoleries of cunning, now exultant in all the nakedness of defiance. But indeed, although the construction of the verse and the composition of the play may both equally seem to bear witness of crude and impatient inexperience, there is no lack of life in any of the tragic or comic figures which play their part through these tempestuous five acts. Even so small a figure as the profligate Puritan parasite of the atheist who hires his hypocrisy to plead against itself is bright with touches of real rough humour. There is not much of this quality in Tourneur's work, and what there is of it is as bitter and as grim in feature and in flavour as might be expected of so fierce and passionate a moralist : but he knows well how to salt his invective with a due sprinkling of such sharply seasoned pleasantries as relieves the historic narrative of John Knox ; whose 'merry'¹ account,

¹ 'These thingis we wreath mearelie.'
Works of John Knox, vol. i. p. 180.

for instance, of Cardinal Beaton's last night in this world has the very savour of Tourneur's tragic irony and implacable disgust in every vivid and relentless line of it.

The execution of this poem is singularly good and bad : there are passages of such metrical strength and sweetness as will hardly be found in the dramatic verse of any later English poet ; and there are passages in which this poet's verse sinks wellnigh to the tragic level of a Killigrew's, a Shadwell's, or a Byron's. Such terminations as 'of,' 'to,' 'with,' 'in,' 'and,' 'my,' 'your,' preceding the substantive or the verb which opens the next verse, make us feel as though we were reading *Sardanapalus* or *The Two Foscari*—a sensation not easily to be endured. In a poet so far superior as Tourneur to the author of those abortions we must seek for an explanation of this perverse error in a transient and tentative theory of realism rather than in an incurable infirmity or obliquity of talent : for no quality is more remarkable in the execution of his masterpiece than his mastery of those metrical properties in which the style of this play is so generally deficient. Whether in dialogue or in monologue, *The Revenger's Tragedy* is so equally admirable for instinctive obedience to nature and imaginative magnificence of inspiration, so equally perfect in the passionate harmony of its verse and the inspired accuracy of its locution, that years of study and elaboration might have seemed necessary to bring about this inexpressible improvement in expression of yet more sombre and more fiery thought or feeling. There are gleams in *The Atheist's Tragedy* of that clear light in which the whole Shakespearean world lay shining, and here and there the bright flames of the stars do still endure

to lighten the gloom of it by flashes or by fits ; the gentle and noble young lovers, whose patient loyalty is at last rescued from the toils of crime to be crowned with happiness and honour, are painted, though rapidly and slightly, with equal firmness of hand and tenderness of touch ; and there is some vigorous and lively humour in the lighter action of the comic scenes, however coarse and crude in handling : but there is no such relief to the terrors of the maturer work, whose sultrier darkness is visible only by the fire kindled of itself, very dreadful, which burns in the heart of the revenger whom it lights along his bloodstained way. Nor indeed is any relief wanted ; the harmony of its fervent and stern emotion is as perfect, as sufficient, as sublime as the full rush and flow of its diction, the fiery majesty of its verse. There never was such a thunderstorm of a play : it quickens and exhilarates the sense of the reader as the sense of a healthy man or boy is quickened and exhilarated by the rolling music of a tempest and the leaping exultation of its flames. The strange and splendid genius which inspired it seems now not merely to feel that it does well to be angry, but to take such keen enjoyment in that feeling, to drink such deep delight from the inexhaustible wellsprings of its wrath, that rage and scorn and hatred assume something of the rapturous quality more naturally proper to faith and hope and love. There is not a breath of rant, not a pad of bombast, in the declamation which fills its dazzling scenes with fire : the language has no more perfect models of style than the finest of its more sustained and elevated passages. The verse is unlike any other man's in the solemn passion of its music : if it reminds us of Shakespeare's or of Webster's, it is simply by right of kinship and

equality of power with the most vivid and sonorous verse that rings from the lips of Coriolanus or of Timon, of Brachiano or the Duchess of Malfy ; not by any servility of discipleship or reverberation of an imitative echo. It is so rich and full and supple, so happy in its freedom and so loyal in its instinct, that its veriest audacities and aberrations have an indefinable harmony of their own. Even if we admit that Tourneur is to Webster but as Webster is to Shakespeare, we must allow, by way of exception to this general rule of relative rank, that in his noblest hours of sustained inspiration he is at least the equal of the greater dramatist on the score of sublime and burning eloquence, poured forth in verse like the rushing of a mighty wind, with fitful breaks and pauses that do but enhance the majestic sweetness and perfection of its forward movement, the strenuous yet spontaneous energy of its triumphant ardour in advance.

To these magnificent qualities of poetry and passion no critic of the slightest note or the smallest pretension to poetic instinct has ever failed to do ample and cordial justice : but to the truthfulness and the power of Cyril Tourneur as a dramatic student and painter of human character, not only has such justice not generally been done, but grave injustice has been too generally shown. It is true that not all the agents in the evolution of his greater tragedy are equally or sufficiently realised and vivified as active and distinct figures : true, for instance, that the two elder sons of the duchess are little more than conventional outlines of such empty violence and futile ambition as might be inferred from the crude and puerile symbolism of their respective designations : but the third brother is a type no less living than

revolting and no less dramatic than detestable : his ruffian cynicism and defiant brutality are in life and death alike original and consistent, whether they express themselves in curses or in jeers. The brother and accomplice of the hero in the accomplishment of his manifold revenge is seldom much more than a serviceable shadow : but there is a definite difference between their sister and the common type of virginal heroine who figures on the stage of almost every dramatist then writing ; the author's profound and noble reverence for goodness gives at once precision and distinction to the outline and a glow of active life to the colour of this pure and straightforward study. The brilliant simplicity of tone which distinguishes the treatment of this character is less remarkable in the figure of the mother whose wickedness and weakness are so easily played upon and blown about by every gust of penitence or temptation ; but there is the same lifelike vigour of touch in the smallest detail of the scenes between her children and herself. It has been objected that her ready avowal of weakness as common to all her sex is the undramatic epigram of a satirist, awkwardly ventriloquising through the mechanism of a tragic puppet ; but it is really quite in keeping with the woman's character to enlarge and extenuate the avowal of her own infamy and infirmity into a sententious reflection on womanhood in general. A similar objection has been raised against the apparent change of character implied in the confession made by the hero to the duke elect, at the close of the play, that he and his brother had murdered the old duke—'all for your grace's good,' and in the cry when arrested and sentenced to instant execution, 'Heart, was 't not for your good, my lord ?' But if this seems incompatible with the high sense of honour

and of wrong which is the mainspring of Vindice's implacable self-devotion and savage unselfishness, the unscrupulous ferocity of the means through which his revenge is worked out may surely be supposed to have blunted the edge of his moral perception, distorted his natural instinct, and infected his nobler sympathies with some taint of contagious egotism and pessimistic obduracy of imagination. And the intensity of sympathy with which this crowning creation of the poet's severe and fiery genius is steadily developed and displayed should make any critic of reasonable modesty think more than twice or thrice before he assumes or admits the likelihood or the possibility of so gross an error or so grave a defect in the conception of so great an artist. For if the claim to such a title might be disputed in the case of a claimant who could show no better credentials than his authorship of *The Atheist's Tragedy*—and even in that far from faultless work of genius there are manifest and manifold signs, not merely of excellence, but of greatness—the claim of the man who could write *The Revenger's Tragedy* is questionable by no one who has any glimmering of insight or perception as to what qualities they are which confer upon the writer the indisputable title to a seat in the upper house of poets.

This master work of Cyril Tourneur, the most perfect and most terrible incarnation of the idea of retribution impersonate and concentrated revenge that ever haunted the dreams of a tragic poet or the vigils of a future tyrannicide, is resumed and embodied in a figure as original and as impossible to forget, for any one who has ever felt the savage fascination of its presence, as any of the humarer figures evoked and immortalized by Shakespeare. The rage of Swift,

without his insanity and impurity, seems to utter in every word the healthier if no less consuming passion of a heart lacerated by indignation and envenomed by contempt as absolute, as relentless, and as inconsolable as his own. And in the very torrent of the man's meditative and solitary passion, a very Phlegethon of agony and fury and ravenous hunger after the achievement of a desperate expiation, comes the sudden touch of sarcasm which serves as a momentary breakwater to the raging tide of his reflections, and reveals the else unfathomable bitterness of a spiritual Marah that no plummet even of his own sinking can sound, and no infusion of less fiery sorrow or less venomous remembrance can sweeten. The mourner falls to scoffing, the justicer becomes a jester : the lover, with the skull of his murdered mistress in his hand, slides into such reflections on the influence of her living beauty as would beseem a sexless and malignant satirist of her sex. This power of self-abstraction from the individual self, this impersonal contemplation of a personal wrong, this contemptuous yet passionate scrutiny of the very emotions which rend the heart and inflame the spirit and poison the very blood of the thinker, is the special seal or sign of original inspiration which distinguishes the type most representative of Tourneur's genius, most significant of its peculiar bias and its peculiar force. Such a conception, clothed in mere prose or in merely passable verse, would be proof sufficient of the mental power which conceived it ; when expressed in such verse as follows, it proves at once and preserves for ever the claim of the designer to a place among the immortals :

Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love,
My study's ornament, thou shell of death,

THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

Once the bright face of my betrothed lady,
 When life and beauty naturally filled out
 These ragged imperfections ;
 When two heaven-pointed diamonds were set
 In these unsightly rings ;—then 'twas a face
 So far beyond the artificial shine
 Of any woman's bought complexion
 That the uprightest man (if such there be,
 That sin but seven times a day) broke custom
 And made up eight with looking after her.

The very fall of the verse has a sort of fierce and savage pathos in the note of it ; a cadence which comes nearer to the echo of such laughter as utters the cry of an anguish too deep for weeping and wailing, for curses or for prayers, than anything in dramatic poetry outside the part of Hamlet. It would be a conjecture not less plausible than futile, though perhaps not less futile than plausible, which should suggest that the influence of Shakespeare's Hamlet may be responsible for the creation of Tourneur's Vindice, and the influence of Tourneur's Vindice for the creation of Shakespeare's Timon. It is a certainty indisputable except by the blatant audacity of immedicable ignorance that the only poet to whose manner and style the style and manner of Cyril Tourneur can reasonably be said to bear any considerable resemblance is William Shakespeare. The more curt and abrupt style of Webster is equally unlike the general style of either. And if, as his first editor observes, 'the parallel' between Tourneur and Marston, 'as far as it goes, is so obvious that it is not worth drawing,' it is no less certain that the divergence between the genius which created Andrugio and the genius which created Vindice is at least as wide as the points of resemblance or affinity between them are vivid and distinct. While Marston's im-

aginative and tragic power was at its highest, his style was crude and quaint, turgid and eccentric ; when he had cured and purified it—perhaps, as Gifford suggests, in consequence of Ben Jonson's unmerciful but salutary ridicule—he approved himself a far abler writer of comedy or tragicomedy than before, but his right hand had forgotten its cunning as the hand of 'a tragic penman.' Now the improvement of Tourneur's style, an improvement amounting to little less than transfiguration, keeps time with his advance as a student of character and a tragic dramatist as distinguished from a tragic poet. The style of his earlier play has much of beauty, of facility, and of freshness : the style of his later play, I must repeat, is comparable only with Shakespeare's. In the superb and inexhaustible imprecations of Timon there is a quality which reminds us of Cyril Tourneur as delightfully as we are painfully reminded of John Marston in reading certain scenes and passages which disfigure and deface the magnificent but incomprehensible composition of *Troilus and Cressida*.

Of Tourneur's two elegies on the death of Sir Francis Vere and of Henry Prince of Wales, it may be said that they are about as good as Chapman's work of the same order : and it may be added that his first editor has shown himself, to say the least, unreasonably and unaccountably virulent in his denunciation of what he assumes to be insincere and sycophantic in the elegiac expression of the poet's regret for a prince of such noble promise as the elder brother of Charles the First. The most earnest and fervent of republicans, if not wanting in common sense and common courtesy, would not dream of reflecting in terms of such unqualified severity on the lamentation of Lord Tennyson for the loss of Albert

the Good : and the warmest admirer of that loudly lamented person will scarcely maintain that this loss was of such grave importance to England as the loss of a prince who might probably have preserved the country from the alternate oppression of prelates and of Puritans, from the social tyranny of a dictator and the political disgrace of the Restoration.

The existence of a comedy by the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and of a comedy bearing the suggestive if not provocative title of *Laugh and Lie Down*, must always have seemed to the students of Lowndes one of the most curious and amusing pieces of information to be gathered from the *Bibliographer's Manual*; and it is with a sense of disappointment proportionate to this sense of curiosity that they will discover the non-existence of such a comedy, and the existence in its stead of a mere pamphlet in prose issued under that more than promising title : which yet, if attainable, ought surely to be reprinted, however dubious may be its claim to the honour of a great poet's authorship. In no case can it possibly be of less interest or value than the earliest extant publication of that poet—*The Transformed Metamorphosis*. Its first editor has given proof of very commendable perseverance and fairly creditable perspicacity in his devoted attempt at elucidation of this most astonishing and indescribable piece of work : but no interpretation of it can hope to be more certain or more trustworthy than any possible exposition of Blake's *Jerusalem* or the *Apocalypse* of St. John. All that can be said by a modest and judicious reader is that any one of these three effusions may unquestionably mean anything that anybody chooses to read into the text ; that a Luther is as safe as a Loyola, that a Renan is no safer than a Cumming, from the

chance of confutation as a less than plausible exponent of its possible significance : but that, however indisputable it may be that they were meant to mean something, not many human creatures who can be trusted to go abroad without a keeper will be likely to pretend to a positive understanding of what that significance may be. To me, the most remarkable point in Tourneur's problematic poem is the fact that this most monstrous example of senseless and barbarous jargon that ever disfigured English type should have been written—were it even for a wager —by one of the purest, simplest, most exquisite and most powerful writers in the language.

This extraordinary effusion is the single and certainly the sufficient tribute of a great poet, and a great master of the purest and the noblest English, to the most monstrous and preposterous taste or fashion of his time. As the product of an eccentric imbecile it would be no less curious than Stanihurst's Virgil : as the work of Cyril Tourneur it is indeed 'a miracle instead of wit.' For it cannot be too often repeated that in mere style, in commanding power and purity of language, in positive instinct of expression and direct eloquence of inspiration, the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy* stands alone in the next rank to Shakespeare. Many if not most of their contemporaries could compose a better play than he probably could conceive—a play with finer variation of incidents and daintier diversity of characters : not one of them, not even Webster himself, could pour forth poetry of such continuous force and flow. The fiery jet of his molten verse, the rush of its radiant and rhythmic lava, seems alone as inexhaustible as that of Shakespeare's. As a dramatist, his faults are doubtless as flagrant as his merits are manifest : as a writer, he

Surely we're all mad people, and they¹
 Whom we think are, are not : we mistake those :
 'Tis we are mad in sense, they but in clothes.

HIPPOLITO. Faith, and in clothes too we, give us our due.

VINDICE. Does every proud and self-affecting dame
 Camphire her face for this ? and grieve her Maker
 In sinful baths of milk—when many an infant starves,
 For her superfluous outside,—all for this ?

What follows is no whit less noble : but as much may be said of the whole part—and indeed of the whole play. Violent and extravagant as the mere action or circumstance may be or may appear, there is a trenchant straightforwardness of appeal in the simple and spontaneous magnificence of the language, a depth of insuppressible sincerity in the fervent and restless vibration of the thought, by which the hand and the brain and the heart of the workman are equally recognisable. But the crowning example of Cyril Tourneur's unique and incomparable genius is of course to be found in the scene which would assuredly be remembered, though every other line of the poet's writing were forgotten, by the influence of its passionate inspiration on the more tender but not less noble sympathies of Charles Lamb. Even the splendid exuberance of eulogy which attributes to the verse of Tourneur a more fiery quality, a more thrilling and piercing note of sublime and agonising indignation, than that which animates and inflames the address of Hamlet to a mother less impudent in infamy than Vindice's cannot be considered excessive by any capable reader who will candidly and carefully compare the two scenes which suggested this comparison. To attempt the praise or the description of anything that has been praised or

¹ Perhaps we might venture here to read—‘and only they.’ In the next line, ‘whom’ for ‘who’ is probably the poet’s own license or oversight.

described by Lamb would usually be the veriest fatuity of presumption : and yet it is impossible to write of a poet whose greatness was first revealed to his countrymen by the greatest critic of dramatic poetry that ever lived and wrote, and not to echo his words of righteous judgment and inspired applause with more or less feebleness of reiteration. The startling and magical power of single verses, ineffaceable and ineradicable from the memory on which they have once impressed themselves, the consciousness in which they have once struck root, which distinguishes and denotes the peculiar style of Cyril Tourneur's tragic poetry, rises to its highest tidemark in this part of the play. Every other line, one might almost say, is an instance of it ; and yet not a single line is undramatic, or deficient in the strictest and plainest dramatic propriety. It may be objected that men and women possessed by the excitement of emotions so desperate and so dreadful do not express them with such passionate precision of utterance : but, to borrow the saying of a later and more famous bearer of the name which Cyril sometimes spelt as, Turner, 'don't they wish they could ?' or rather, ought they not to wish it ? What is said by the speakers is exactly what they might be expected to think, to feel, and to express with less incisive power and less impressive accuracy of ardent epigram or of strenuous appeal.¹

¹ It is, to say the least, singular to find in the most famous scene of a play so often reprinted and re-edited a word which certainly requires explanation passed over without remark from any one of the successive editors. When Gratiana, threatened by the daggers of her sons, exclaims—

Are you so barbarous to set iron nipples
Upon the breast that gave you suck ?

Vindice retorts, in reply to her appeal—

That breast

Is turned to quarled poison.

This last epithet is surely unusual enough to call for some attempt at

There are among poets, as there are among prose writers, some whose peculiar power finds vent only in a broad and rushing stream of speech or song, triumphant by the general force and fullness of its volume, in which we no more think of looking for single lines or phrases that may be detached from the context and quoted for their separate effect than of selecting for peculiar admiration some special wave or individual ripple from the multitudinous magnificence of the torrent or the tide. There are others whose power is shown mainly in single strokes or flashes as of lightning or of swords. There are few indeed outside the pale of the very greatest who can display at will their natural genius in the keenest concentration or the fullest effusion of its powers. But among these fewer than few stands the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. The great scene of the temptation and the triumph of Castiza would alone be enough to give evidence, not adequate merely

interpretation. But none whatever has hitherto been offered. In the seventh line following from this one there is another textual difficulty. The edition now before me, Eld's of 1608, reads literally thus :

VIND. Ah ist possible, *Thou only*, you powers on hie,
That women should dissemble when they die?

Lamb was content to read,

Ah, is it possible, you powers on high,
and so forth. Perhaps the two obviously corrupt words in italics may contain a clue to the right reading, and this may be it :

Ah !
Is 't possible, you heavenly powers on high,
That women should dissemble when they die ?

Or may not this be yet another instance of the Jew-Puritan abhorrence of the word God as an obscene or blasphemous term when uttered outside the synagogue or the conventicle ? If so, we might read—and believe that the poet wrote—

Is 't possible, thou only God on high,

and assume that the licenser struck out the indecent monosyllable and left the mutilated text for actors and printers to patch or pad at their discretion.

but ample, that such praise as this is no hyperbole of sympathetic enthusiasm, but simply the accurate expression of an indisputable fact. No lyrist, no satirist, could have excelled in fiery flow of rhetoric the copious and impetuous eloquence of the lines, at once luxurious and sardonic, cynical and seductive, in which Vindice pours forth the arguments and rolls out the promises of a professional pleader on behalf of aspiring self-interest and sensual self-indulgence : no dramatist that ever lived could have put more vital emotion into fewer words, more passionate reality into more perfect utterance, than Tourneur in the dialogue that follows them :

MOTHER. Troth, he says true.

CASTIZA.

False : I defy you both :

I have endured you with an ear of fire :

Your tongues have struck hot irons on my face.

Mother, come from that poisonous woman there.

MOTHER. Where ?

CASTIZA. Do you see not her ? she 's too inward then.

I could not count the lines which on reperusal of this great tragic poem I find apt for illustrative quotation, or suggestive of a tributary comment : but enough has already been cited to prove beyond all chance of cavil from any student worthy of the name that the place of Cyril Tourneur is not among minor poets, nor his genius of such a temper as naturally to attract the sympathy or arouse the enthusiasm of their admirers ; that among the comrades or the disciples who to us may appear but as retainers or satellites of Shakespeare his rank is high and his credentials to that rank are clear. That an edition more carefully revised and annotated, with a text reduced to something more of coherence and intelligible arrangement, than has yet been vouchsafed

to us, would suffice to place his name among theirs of whose eminence the very humblest of their educated countrymen are ashamed to seem ignorant, it would probably be presumptuous to assert. But if the noblest ardour of moral emotion, the most fervent passion of eager and indignant sympathy with all that is best and abhorrence of all that is worst in women or in men—if the most absolute and imperial command of all resources and conquest of all difficulties inherent in the most effective and the most various instrument ever yet devised for the poetry of the tragic drama—if the keenest insight and the sublimest impulse that can guide the perception and animate the expression of a poet whose line of work is naturally confined to the limits of moral or ethical tragedy—if all these qualities may be admitted to confer a right to remembrance and a claim to regard, there can be no fear and no danger of forgetfulness for the name of Cyril Tourneur.